SHORT STORIES

THE NURSE'S BONNET HAD FALLEN BACK AND REVEALED THE FEATURES OF RIGBY STARR!

No. 715
24/10/03

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SHORT STORIES.

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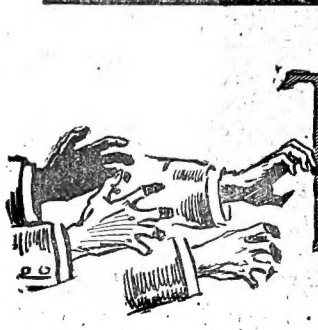

THE PURSUIT OF SARA

For New Readers.

Miss Sara Gillespie, who is the relater of these experiences, found employment as a typine in the firm of Messrs. Templeton and Co., General Agents. The partners in the firm were Mr. Templeton, Mr. Harrington Shackell, and Mr. Rigby Starr. They treated Sara most courteously, especially the senior partner, who, before very long, induced her to tell him all about her absent lover, Noel Masterman. The latter was by profession a doctor, but as he lacked the capital to start a practice in England, he had accepted the post of medical attendant to an old school friend, who was travelling on the Continent for the benefit of his health, and was at present in Nice. Noel had been brought up by his uncle, Sir Francis Masterman, and had excellent prospects, but he incurred the displeasure of the Baronet when he fell in love with Miss Gillespie, and Sir Francis refused to have anything more to do with him. Mr. Templeton assured Sara that he thought Noel had been very hardly treated, and suggested that the best thing for him to do would be to return, and he would see whether he could not obtain a practice for him.

Then one day Noel entered the office unexpectedly, and told his love he had had a wire from his cousin Herbert, saying that Sir Francis was not expected to live long. He had hastened from Nice in order to get his uncle's forgiveness before his death. Sara and he then drove straight to the Baronet's house, only to find that he had already passed away, and that Herbert was now holder of the title. In his will Noel's uncle had bequeathed him a thousand pounds, and with this he intended to buy a practice to which Mr. Templeton had recommended him. One evening Noel and Sara paid a visit to Sir Herbert, and learnt from him that he had insured his life in favour of Templeton and Co. for fifteen thousand pounds. Just as they were leaving Sir Herbert's valet entered, and, with a cry of amazement, Sara asserted that he was Harrington Shackell, one of her employers.

The two men ridiculed the idea, and assured her that the likeness could be but a chance one; they explained that Shackell had a moustache, whereas the valet was clean shaven.

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With this explanation Miss Gillespie had to remain content. The following day Noel received a telegram summoning him back to Nice, and in order that he should be able to buy the practice in question, he gave the thousand pounds to Mr. Templeton, and signed a document authorising the firm to deal for him. By a piece of trickery, the senior partner converted this document into one authorising the firm to deal *with his whole estate.*

In the afternoon Sara overheard Templeton and Rigby Starr talking, and their words aroused her suspicions. She understands that Noel is heir to the Baronetcy, in the event of Sir Herbert having no children, and realises that, should Sir Herbert die, the firm has sole control of her lover's estate.

Just then Harrington Shackell entered, and she was shocked to hear him announce that Sir Herbert Masterman was dead—murdered by him, his valet! So, after all, her suspicion had been only too well grounded! Then, little by little, she heard the diabolical plot against her lover unfolded, and also the hint that she herself was in danger, as she was the only one the murderers had to fear, and they intended that they should run no risks whatever.

Then she resolved on a bold scheme—to get possession of the notes and the document.

She crouched back behind the door.

The three plotters were all too engrossed in their schemes to notice her, so she crept carefully and slowly out of her hiding place, and across the room.

Gradually she came within reach of the precious papers.

She dared not hesitate.

Blindly she snatched the notes, clutched the document.

Then, when too late, the men espied her. With a shriek she rushed across the room, turning over chairs and tables in her flight. One of the villains threw a stick at her, and struck her.

In the nick of time she reaches the door and slams it in the face of her pursuers, locking it on the outside.

Then she fled. Down the long corridor she tore, and into the street.

You will read of what befell her at Bedford in the following pages.

Week by week Miss Gillespie will continue her narrative.

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THIS WEEK'S EPISODE.
in Peril at Bedford.

I HAVE no clear recollection of leaving the building in which the offices of Templeton & Co. were situated. I was so shaken by the suspense, the terror, of the last half hour, that I was able to obey one instinct only—that of flight. A hurried rush down crowded streets, jostled by the throng that filled the pavements pushed now to one side, now to another, I found myself at length at the Bank of England, one of a stream of pedestrians waiting for a 'bus.

As yet I had formed no plans of what to do, where to go, to avoid pursuit. My mind was concentrated on the packet of bank notes clutched firmly in my hand, together with the paper which gave Templeton the power to use my lover's fortune as he pleased. One thing was certain. I dared not return to my lodgings. That would be the first place likely to be searched and the last in which I must be found. I must seek out a spot remote from London, with people of whom I had not spoken at the office.

At this moment an omnibus for The Angel, Islington, drew up. My lodgings were in Brixton, it would, therefore, be quite safe to journey in the opposite direction, to the north of London. I scrambled to the top and secured a seat close to the driver. Then, but not till then, I found some measure of quiet and self-control. Rapidly I ran over a list of acquaintances likely to help me. I must secure a hiding-place where I could remain in safety until Noel should return to England. I racked my brain in vain for some long time until there flashed across my mind the recollection of a girl whom I had known at school. She was my senior by some years, and had secured an appointment as a teacher in the High School at Bedford. Her name was Ellen Hartley. As I remembered her she was a person of decided character and with plenty of commonsense. She would appreciate the difficulties of my position and assist me to remain in hiding till Noel returned.

I decided to start for Bedford that same night. To that end I changed my omnibus at The Angel for one going in the direction of St. Pancras Station. It was just on eight o'clock when I reached the Midland Terminus. The next train to Bedford did not start till 8.40. I had over half an hour to wait. Rapidly glancing round to see if I were followed, I made my way to the station telegraph office, and sent a wire to Noel at his hotel at Nice to this effect: "Imperative you return to England at once—most urgent. Reply to Bedford Post Office.—SARA."

This done I went to the refreshment room and forced myself to eat some excessively dry sandwiches for support upon my journey. I waited there until the last moment, hurrying through the barrier just as the train was going to start. A last look up the platform as we steamed out of the station revealed a tall figure running towards the gate waving a frantic appeal after the retreating train. For an awful moment I thought that it was Shackleton, and fell back into my seat sick with fear. If they should stop the train! I saw myself hauled out of the carriage, conveyed to the nearest police station charged with theft! I clutched the bank notes tightly and crouched back into my corner. Thank Heaven we were off. The platform out of sight, London fast receding, Templeton & Co.—behind.

Bedford Post Office, at which the reply to Sara's telegram was called for by one of her pursuers.

The carriage was empty for nearly the whole way. At Luton, however, an old man and his daughter got in. They addressed some casual would-be friendly remarks to me, but I was too nervous to respond, and murmured some incoherent reply that must have conveyed the impression I was mentally deficient. There were no further stoppages until we arrived at Bedford. The train was late, it was past ten by the time we reached our destination.

I was worn out with stress of emotion, and felt terribly cold and wretched as I stumbled on to the platform. It was too late to attempt to find Ellen Hartley that night; I must defer my search for her until the next morning. Meanwhile I must obtain a lodging for the night. I was afraid to ask the porters if they could tell me of a hotel, for I wished to leave no clue by which I could be traced. I left the station and wandered through the ill-lit streets round about until I found myself in the Midland Road. The County Theatre, brightly illuminated, revealed the burly form of a policeman.

Taking heart of grace, I asked for the principal thoroughfare of the town.

"Keep straight on, and you'll come to the High Street," was the reply, so to the High Street I turned my steps.

It is a picturesque thoroughfare leading to the river at one end and a fine avenue of trees the other, but I had no opportunity of admiring its beauties that night. The shops for the most part were closed, but a confectioner, of the name of Norman, still showed a glimmer of gas in the window. I ventured inside the door.

"Could you recommend me a nice quiet hotel?" I faltered, and seemed to feel the girl's sharp eyes go through me.

"There's The Swan," she began, "but," she paused, her glance took in my pale face and drooping figure, noted my absence of luggage, and grew suspicious.

"Thanks very much," I murmured, and bolted back into the street. I found The Swan without much difficulty. A tall square building fronting the High Street, its side windows looked on the embankment of the river Ouse. The hall looked bright and cheery through the swing doors and spoke of comfort within. It was a large place and I felt doubtful as to the wisdom of staying there. And yet, what else could I do? Past ten o'clock in a strange town, beset by fears, tired in body and in mind, I felt I must at all costs secure a good night's rest.

I made my way down the long hall to the office. A pleasant-looking woman attended to my request for a room, and anticipating her inquiry for my luggage, I boldly stated that my bag had been left behind!

"The porter forgot to put it in the carriage," I said without blushing. "It will be sent after me to-morrow."

No further demur was made, and having registered my name as "Brown," the chambermaid led the way up several flights of stairs and along a corridor to room No. 29. I ordered some supper, and, drawing a comfortable chair before the open window, gazed out into the night.

There was a bright moon, and in the soft light the river, which the room overlooked, shone like silver. The tiny waves lapped the shore with a swish-swish infinitely soothing. The trees rustled gently in the wind; over the water, across the straggling branches was borne the echo of the church clock chiming some sweet, old-fashioned melody to mark the hour. It was "The Blue Bells of Scotland," and the refrain brought an ache to my heart, called up an unutterable longing for my boy. "It was oh in my heart that I wished him safe at home"!

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I ate the cold beef brought for my refreshment, and then having locked the door and bolted the window, took the packet of bank notes from my dress, and sat down to consider what was best to do with them—and the all-important paper Noel had signed.

I had of my own money some five pounds in my purse, ample, as I then thought, to keep me until Noel came back. If I had known all that was to happen—the weary time that I should have to wait, the risk that I should have to run—before he came, I doubt if I should have had the courage to fight on. As it was I comforted myself with the belief that at most I should not have to wait longer than two days—perhaps a week, no more. And then a step down the corridor sent the blood rushing from my heart, and brought me shuddering to the door. Had they found me, was it the police come to arrest me as a thief, a thief who had stolen notes to the value of £1,000 ?

The steps passed on. I drew a sigh of relief, and once more bent my mind to the task in hand. It was folly to carry the notes about with me. If I were captured by one of the firm the prize would be ready to their hand. And yet, where could I deposit such an amount in safety ? I dare not open a banking account, in all probability the numbers of the missing notes would be circulated throughout the country by the next day. I, and I alone could guard them. I decided to cut the notes in halves, keep ten halves myself, and deposit the remaining ten next morning in the cloak-room of the railway station. By this means if the enemy secured me they would still be at a loss for the money. The paper which Noel had signed—the power of attorney as Templeton had called it—was a different matter.

For a moment I considered the advisability of tearing it up. Without the paper the firm would do nothing injurious to Noel, but then I remembered the document was the sole proof of my innocence. Without it I should stand condemned as a thief, who had stolen the notes in a most audacious manner. The possession of the paper justified my action and my flight. At all costs I must keep it. I slept with the previous document under my pillow and next morning stitched it in the bodice of my dress. Come what would it should not be taken from me while I lived.

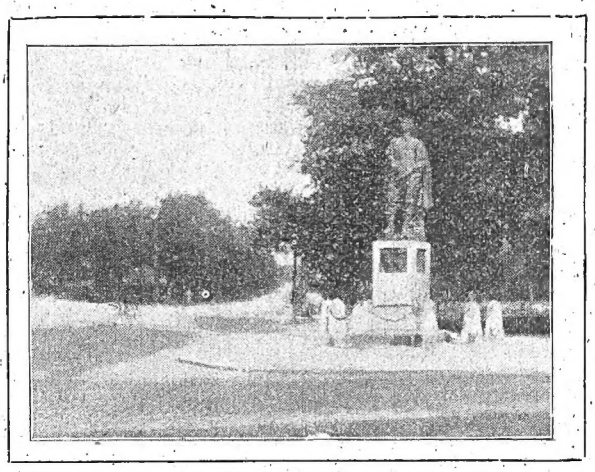
I fell asleep towards the morning, and woke to find the sunshine streaming across my face. It was an exquisite day, and, when after a comfortable breakfast I went out into the town, I felt, despite the forebodings of the previous night, despite the fears that even now assailed me, that in the end all would come right. The High Street looked its best that bright September morning. The shops with their air of quiet prosperity, the old-world atmosphere, that clings like a perfume to the quaint town—which even the electric light cannot bring up to date—combined to raise my spirits.

I found my way to the station and deposited the little packet of notes, or rather half notes, at the cloak-room, and gave the man implicit instructions not to deliver it to anyone but myself even if they produced the necessary ticket. From the station I retraced my steps to a shop in Silver Street that combined a sale of chemicals with that of bags and fancy goods.

I purchased a small portmanteau, and crossing the road, completed my shopping at "Dust's" in High Street, and had the bag and its contents sent to my hotel.

By this time it was close on ten o'clock. It would be too early, I decided, to go to the post-office and inquire for Noel's telegram. It was better not to call there until I felt certain the wire had arrived. If Templeton and Co. had traced me to Bedford, the post-office would be one of the first places at which they would inquire. Unfortunately my red hair would make my identification an easy matter. If I had only known my over-caution was to prove my ruin. With the trick in my hands I gave the game away !

It came upon me as a shock when I arrived at the High School to find it closed. I had forgotten it was the vacation, though unconsciously I had noted the absence of the troops of the bright-faced boys and girls which Ellen had declared were always to be seen about the town. The playground



Bunyan's Statue, Bedford, where Sara first saw the nurse who deceived her.

was deserted, the big iron gates locked; silence reigned supreme.

As I turned to leave, the name and address of the caretaker caught my attention :

GEORGE FRYATT,
Rosslyn,
Hartingdon Street.

As an official of the establishment he would doubtless know the address of the teachers, and he could tell me where Ellen would be found. With some difficulty I found Hartingdon Street, and after a long search among two-storeyed dwellings of small size but pretentious names, unearthed *Rosslyn*. Mr. Fryatt was a broad-shouldered, easy-tempered person, with a heavy moustache, not nearly so high and mighty as the name of his habitation. He could give me no information, moreover, as to Ellen's whereabouts. Miss Hartley was no longer at the High School, and so far as he knew, not in Bedford. The news came upon me as a thunder-clap; dazed and despairing, I turned towards the High Street once again. I glanced at the shops, butcher, baker, grocer—surely some of them must know the name of Hartley. Ellen had lived some time in Bedford, with her mother, the widow of an officer. It was impossible all trace of her could be lost. Nevertheless, I pursued my questions in vain, and cross-examined stationers, boot-makers, and milliners, to no purpose, until with a flash of inspiration I entered the stores at the corner of Dame Alice Street, rejoicing in the name of Dudeney and Johnston.

"They had served Miss Hartley and her mother for some time, in fact up to the end of June. Their house was at the top of De Pary's Avenue, on the left-hand side going to the park. One of the prettiest houses in the row, with carefully kept flower-garden, impossible to mistake it."

Thanking the assistant for his information I hastened to follow his direction. As I came out of the stores, the sun, shining on the Avenue, lit up the statue of John Bunyan with a sudden radiance. Preoccupied as I was, the beauty of the figure against its background of leafy trees came home to me. With face upturned to the sky the great Pilgrim stood, "pleading with men," urging with eyes and hand.

I wondered as I gazed if Bunyan had ever felt so much afraid and perplexed as I. The powers and principalities of Darkness arrayed against me could never have seemed so terrible to him. And yet he had been to gaol, here in this town. And at the thought and all that it suggested, I shivered, despite the sunshine.

Others beside me seemed attracted by the statue that morning. A young fair-haired woman, dressed as a hospital nurse, was reading the inscription on the pedestal. At her side stood a slim, dark fellow with a good-looking, eager face.

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I fancied they were lovers, and remembered Noel, with a thrill of envy. The next minute the pretty smiling face had darkened, something her companion said seemed to distress her, she flushed, then put her handkerchief to her eyes, and moved into the shadow.

Poor girl! I thought, and took an instinctive dislike to the young man for vexing her. Later I changed my opinion.

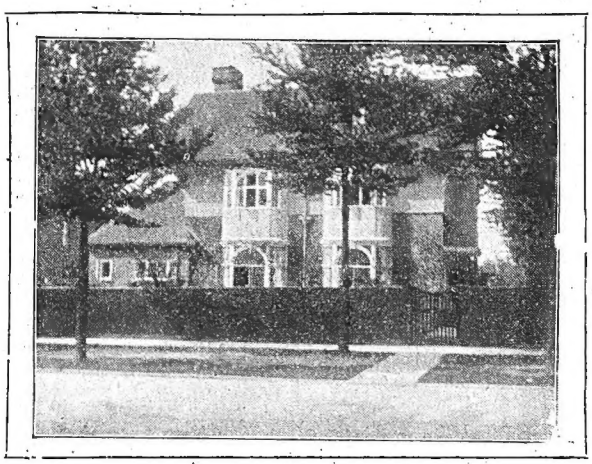
My mind was full of Noel as I walked up the Avenue, and I seemed to reach the house, described to me as Ellen's, very quickly. The garden was bright with flowers, the windows daintily curtained. It was a pleasant place, and my pulse quickened at the thought that I might find in it a haven.

Up the broad, gravelled path to a prettily-porched door where a maid-servant answered my summons.

"Miss Hartley? She left here some months ago. I couldn't tell you her address at all. I did hear she'd gone abroad."

That and that alone was all the information she could give me! The friend on whom I had relied for help was gone. The refuge I had hoped to gain was lost. I loathed the sunshine; as I walked down the garden path the roses were hateful to me, the brightness of the morning hurt me.

For the first time I realised how hopeless was the struggle on which I had embarked. How could I, a young, inexperienced girl, hope to defeat three of the boldest and most unscrupulous criminals of the day? If only Noel would wire to me—I glanced wistfully down the Avenue towards the post-office. No, it was still too early to inquire for the telegram. It was not yet half-past ten, he would only just have arrived in Nice. I must wait a little longer.



De Pary's Avenue, Bedford, where Sara meets with a bitter disappointment.

From the Avenue I found my way into the Park. The gates stood invitingly open, I caught a glimpse of cool, green trees, and longing for a place in which to sit and rest I crossed the Park and walked over the grass, to where, against a leafy clump of crab-apple a seat was placed invitingly. The shouts of the boys and girls sounded in the distance, the cries of the children at play faded to a pleasant hum. I leant back and closed my eyes, and for a little while I must have slept.

When I awoke, someone was sitting beside me. It was the nurse whom I had seen by Bunyan's statue. She was even prettier than I had thought, with dainty pink and white complexion, and soft, fair hair, parted on a low broad brow. She was no longer crying, but there was a wistful look on her face, and the sensitive lips quivered.

"Is anything the matter?" I asked impulsively. "I mean, can I do anything to help you? You must forgive my asking, but——"

"It's very good of you to care," she answered in a husky sort of voice, "and I'm grateful to you for speaking. You see"—she turned towards me with a sudden appeal—"it's dreadful to be all alone when one's in trouble. I don't know a soul in this place. There's not a person here to care whether I live or die. I'm nursing a cross-grained old woman, who grudges me a moment away from her bedside. And, and"—here the handkerchief came into requisition and the pretty face was distorted with sobs. "I've had dreadful news," she gasped, "my sweetheart's ill, and I can't go to him. My brother told me this morning. He came over from Elstow to let me know."

"Where is your sweetheart?" I asked, full of sympathy.

"In London, he's down with diphtheria. The people he's living with wired to my brother who came to tell me. You see, I'm so poor I daren't throw up my nursing engagement, and Dick is as badly off as I am."

It seemed a sorry story, and such comfort as I could give unavailing. However, I recounted all the instances I could recall of people who had recovered from the complaint, and my stories seemed to have a reviving effect. She talked more brightly, her cheeks grew pink, her eyes sparkled, and once or twice she laughed in a quick, excited sort of fashion, that struck me as peculiar.

"It's done me good to see you," she said at last, "I feel ever so much more hopeful about Dick. You don't look very well yourself, dear, are you in pain? I notice you keep pressing your hand to your heart."

I flushed crimson and wished my new-found friend had not been so observant. The notes were concealed in my bodice and in nervous apprehension at their loss my hand stole now and again to my side to reassure myself of their safety.

"It's nothing much, thank you," I answered, and rose to take my departure.

"Sha'n't I see you again, dear?" she asked. "I'm off duty this evening; I wish you'd meet me and go for a walk. It's beautiful by the river. I'll be at the Suspension Bridge some time between eight and nine. I shall hope to see you. Anyway," she pressed my hand warmly, "I sha'n't forget your kindness. Good-bye."

I left her on the seat, her slim figure outlined against the green of the crab-apple trees behind. The echo of her laugh came after me; mocking, scornful, it reminded me of somebody, though whom I could not think. It gave me a creepy sensation to hear her. There was something unpleasant, almost evil in the sound. And yet who could associate evil with so pretty a creature? She was so simple, so innocent. She had not asked my name nor displayed any curiosity concerning me; only that one question, why did I press my hand to my heart? And that was surely explained by the fact of her profession.

From the park I went to the post-office.

I arrived in Dame Alice Street flushed and out of breath. Trembling with agitation I could hardly control my voice as I put the all important question:

"Is there a telegram addressed to 'Gillespie'?"

The clerk, a short, clean-shaven man with a sharp face and peering eyes glanced at me suspiciously.

"Who are you?" he asked abruptly.

"My name is Gillespie—Sara Gillespie," I answered.

"Have you any proof of that?"

"Proof?" I gazed at him, it was so foolish, so ridiculous a thing to be asked for a proof that I was—myself.

"Come," he said brusquely, "I've no time to waste. Have you any letters or documents to show you are the person you state yourself to be?"

The blood rushed to my cheeks.

"I only came here last night," I stammered, "but—but—I can tell you from whom the telegram is coming. It is from Nice, from a gentleman named Noel Masterman. It is of the utmost importance. It is life and death. I swear that I am Sara Gillespie. For Heaven's sake give me the telegram." And I stretched out my hand imploringly.

At the very moment when I had uttered my name, a woman

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standing at my side uttered an exclamation. I turned and recognised her as the manageress of The Swan.

"I thought you said your name was Brown," she said coldly. "You registered it as Brown, at all events."

"I thought as much," said the clerk. "Look here," he leant across the counter, bringing his face level with my own, "I don't want to get you into trouble, but unless you are careful, I sha'n't be able to avoid it. The telegram you speak of was given to a young lady some half hour ago. She told me that another person was likely to call and claim it, and that I was to be careful not to give that person any information. To be plain, she said you were an impostor, and——" He glanced at the woman next to me, "it's pretty clear you are. The lady gave proof she was the rightful owner of the telegram, that she was the Gillespie referred to in the address. Now," he motioned towards the door, "you'd better go before you make matters any worse. Make haste, Miss—Brown," and he laughed derisively.

For a moment the full significance of what he said did not come home to me. I stared at him stupidly, blankly. Then, as the hideousness of what had happened became clear, I broke into pleading, protestations, threats. I clambered wildly for my rights, sobbed out Heaven knows what prayers, what revilings, until, worn out with emotion and realising at last the futility of all requests, I left the office and wandered weeping and half distraught about the town.

How they stared at me, the people in the High Street! Elderly gentlemen with the unmistakable air of Army officers surveyed me sternly, pretty young girls, gazing in the fascinating hat and bonnet shops, regarded me askance. I did not heed them, I paid no regard to looks and comments, but hurried on, my brain surging with hate, my blood on fire for revenge.

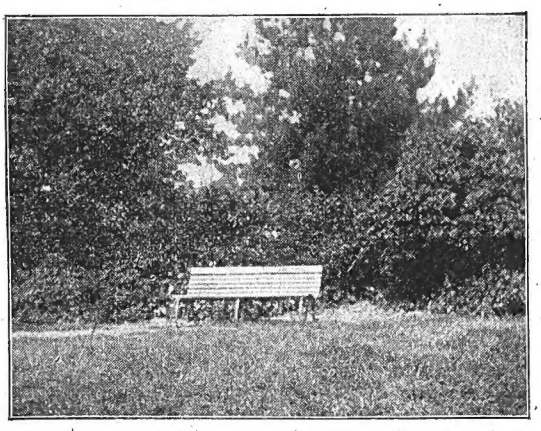
What could I do, what was there left for me to do? Templeton & Co. had outwitted me.

I lost a precious hour before reason suggested the only possible method of repairing a mistake The firm had obtained possession of Noel's wire and had doubtless replied to it. There was a bare chance that by sending another telegram I might counteract the effect of the bogus one already dispatched. Buoyed up with fresh hope, I hastened to the Midland Station, and dispatched a message to my lover from the railway office. I urged him to take no notice of any other wires he might receive, but to come back at once. The address I furnished this time was that of a stationer in the Midland Road, named Sawyer. I had already interviewed him and obtained his promise to receive all communications addressed to "Sara" at the cost of a penny each.

This done I felt a little calmer, and by the time I had been for a long tramp, my nerves were once more under control. I felt weak and hungry, and remembering a certain Oriental café I had noticed by the post office, I made for Dame Alice Street, and passed through its hospitable portals.

A large pleasant room with Japanese screens and curtains which formed convenient alcoves for small tea parties of three and four, the place was crammed with people. The food was dainty, and the waitress, a pretty, dark-haired damsel with bright eyes and shining teeth, soft footed, and tactful. She moved my table into a quiet corner, and asked me nicely if I were tired. Just a few words, but in my soreness of heart and bitterness of spirit, they comforted me. I shall always think of the dark-haired waitress at the Oriental café with kindness.

High Street, Bedford. The Swan Hotel, where Sara stayed, is on the right.



The seat in the park where Sara slept, worn out with fatigue and worry.

Tea over, I hastened back to Sawyers, and inquired if my anxiously expected wire had come.

"Not yet," was the answer, and the same reply greeted my further application an hour later.

Tired to death I felt unable longer to keep up. My limbs would not support me, I felt that if I did not rest I should utterly collapse. With the courage of despair I went back to The Swan, though after the scene at the post office, I half-feared they would demur. Nothing was said, however, and I went up to my room and flung myself on the bed, craving for rest.

Here at least I was safe, the door was locked, the key in my hand. Templeton and Co. could not break in upon me. The next time I went down the street, one of the firm might capture me, but for the present I was secure. And yet the apprehension that even now one of them might be watching The Swan on my account prevented me from rest. The feeling was so strong upon me that I started to my feet, and, opening the window, looked down on the embankment.

The river lay cool and pleasant in the fading light of the afternoon. There were a few loiterers upon the landing-stage watching the boats come in, and a trap drawn by a powerful-looking grey was drawn up just opposite my window. The driver bending down was speaking to someone in the street. Then a stout man in a black suit clambered into the vehicle. There was something familiar about the cut of his frock coat, and I caught a gleam of shirt front that sent my heart into my throat.

The next moment fear became certainty. The man turned in his seat and glanced towards the window—glanced at me! And in that glance I recognised the senior partner, Richard Templeton. I drew back from the window and half fainting fell on my knees upon the floor.

He had seen me, I felt sure of that. Was he going to take me now, send for the police at once to arrest me? Or would he wait awhile? Sooner or later he would put out his smooth, white hand and clutch me in its cruel grasp. When? That was the question. How long before—before? My lips moved convulsively.

"He shall not take me!" I murmured, "he shall not take me."

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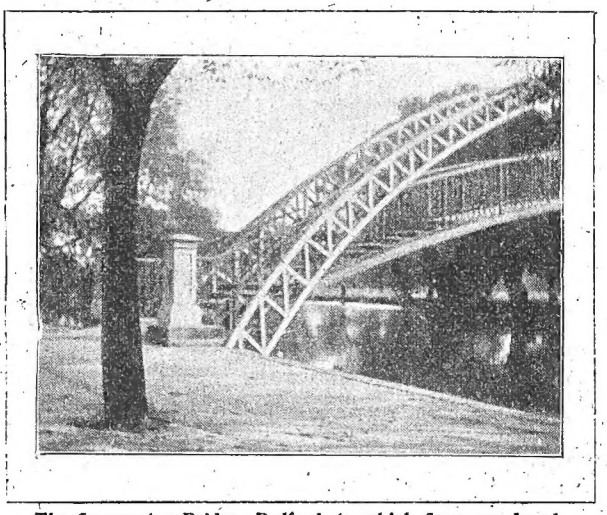
I rose to my feet and gazed from the window. Had Templeton been there, God knows what rash and awful thing I might have done. I was mad at the moment, and with terror and suspense. But I searched the river front in vain for his portly figure. He had gone—for the moment I was saved.

But only for the moment. He might return at any instant and find me in The Swan. The instinct of flight was strong upon me. I would leave Bedford, and take refuge in one of the big Midland cities. I would go now, at once. Even as I reached the door I remembered that I dare not go until I had an answer to my telegram. I must know where Noel was, what he meant to do. It was time now to call again at the shop in the Midland Road and ask for the wire. I glanced up and down the corridor, craned my head over the broad staircase. The sound of voices, the jingle of plates and glasses, rose from the hall. It was the dinner hour. At that moment perhaps my enemies were in the dining-room waiting for me.

I cautiously descended the stairs, pausing in the middle of the flight. A tall, broad-shouldered figure standing with his back towards me at the bar, filled me with fresh fear. It was Templeton himself!

For a moment I stood irresolute. If he turned and saw me—the game was up. If I retraced my steps and sought again the refuge of my room, it did but delay the evil hour. Some time or other I must leave my shelter, and fall into his hands. My brain worked quickly. I saw and seized the one chance of escape.

With a quick drawn breath, I sped lightly down the few remaining stairs, and slowly, cautiously walked down the long hall to the swing doors which led to liberty. I did not hurry, the least sign of haste I felt would betray me. The lights of the town twinkled in the distance. It seemed as though I never should reach those two glass doors. The last few steps my courage failed. I ran the short distance yet remaining, ran from the place, and never stopped until I reached the Midland Road.



The Suspension Bridge, Bedford, to which Sara was lured.

"No wire?" I asked, my voice trembling with agitation. "Are you sure, please look again, you may have made a mistake? It is so—so terribly important."

"There's no telegram or letter either," said the man, "perhaps it will come later."

Perhaps! If not, what was there left for me to do? I had escaped Templeton once, but I might never have such luck again. My only hope of avoiding capture at his hands was to leave Bedford then and there, and yet by doing this, I cut off all communication with Noel. I could not leave until I had heard from him. If I could find a safe place in which to hide, I would run the risk of remaining for a little while at least. Yet where could I find a refuge? In this strange town I was helpless, not a creature would stretch out a hand to my assistance.

Unless it was the nurse I'd met that morning. I recalled her pretty face and gentle manner. She had thanked me for my sympathy, perhaps if I told her something of my troubles she would try to help me, give me a hiding-place for to-night at least. It was a slender chance, but I was desperate and ready to pluck at straws.

It wanted but a few minutes to eight when I reached the Suspension Bridge. The embankment was deserted, the river lay cold and grey under a sullen sky, across the water came the rushing of the weir. It was a lonely spot, at that hour, on a dull night like this not a soul was to be seen. The promenade, with its leafy trees, thronged with pleasure-seekers on a summer evening, was desolate and still. The lights from the houses standing back from the road were the only sign of human presence. And the houses seemed very far away. I crossed the bridge, and, standing in the middle, on the apex of the arch, searched either shore for a sign of the fair-haired nurse.

The water rushed over the weir, the wind sighed among the branches. I shivered, and as St. Paul's chimed the half-hour, and still she had not come, the greyness of the river crept into my soul.

Fearful of turning back, afraid to go on, I leant against the column at the foot of the bridge and waited in the silence of the night.

It might have been half an hour later when I heard a soft footfall across the path. A low, curious laugh sounded close beside me, a hand was laid on my arm.

"You dear thing," said a voice—the nurse's voice, "have you waited for me all this time, how good of you!"

She looked very fresh, altogether charming in her neat costume of brown, and the slight feeling of uneasiness that had inspired me that morning vanished as her big blue eyes met mine.

"You are tired and cold," she said caressingly, "and I believe you are in trouble. You comforted me this morning, it's my turn to play consoler now. You must tell me what's worrying you. Let's find a quiet spot where we can talk undisturbed."

It struck me that the place where we were standing was as quiet, not to say remote, as could be desired. But I yielded to the suggestion, and linking her arm in mine, the nurse and I turned in the direction of Newnham Bridge.

The silence grew denser, the darkness more profound. The rushing of the weir, which alone broke the stillness of the night, sounded ominous.

"Let us stay here," I said, pointing to a seat, "I don't care to go any farther. If I'm to tell you my troubles I'd better begin at once. Otherwise you may not have time to hear my tale."

"I haven't to go back for another hour," she answered, "let us go a little farther, dear, and we shall be quite undisturbed. Oh, I know it looks quiet enough here, but there are always a lot of loiterers on the embankment. I prefer to talk where I'm sure of not being overheard."

She laughed as she spoke, and the sound sent a shudder through me. I felt a sudden fear of this fair-haired, sweet-faced woman, and was half-inclined to return and run the risk of meeting Templeton. Even as the thought crossed my mind, she tightened her hold upon my arm and hurried me along the narrow path. The water here seemed very deep; the river, cold and clear beneath the sullen sky, must hold many a strange, dark secret in its keeping. Overhead the trees bent their boughs shivering in the night wind.

The nurse and I were quite alone!

By this time we had reached the end of the embankment and arrived at Newnham Bridge. Lonely and most romantic of spots, the scene of lovers' meetings, vows, farewells! Here,

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at this tree that overhangs the water, if legend is to be believed, long, long ago, a sister from a neighbouring convent kept a fatal tryst with a cavalier, who stole her heart away. There, so the story goes, the mother abbess traced them and, rather than brave the church's ban, the unhappy sister jumped into the river and found quiet in its cold depths.

Lonely it was, aye, very lonely. Strange whispers came from the trees, faint murmurs rose from the water.

"One moment, dear," said the nurse. "I've dropped my handkerchief. I must run back and find it."

I watched her down the path until she disappeared among the trees. Then, fascinated with the quiet of the place, the strangeness of the scene, I dropped upon the grass that grows right to the river's brink, and, leaning my head upon my hand, rested against the trunk of the wide-spreading tree that stands within a few yards of the bridge.

The rushing of the weir made music in the distance. Strange how the sound fascinated me. The water was deep, deep at my feet—how terrible a death to drown in that limpid stream.

I recalled with a shudder the tale that I had heard, how only a few days back, playing with his little girl in the recreation ground across the bridge, a man had tripped and fallen into the river. And so deep the water was, so treacherous its current, that he was borne away out of sight, out of the ken of those he loved. The band had been playing, the people had been laughing as he fell—and no one knew.

It was a terrible death to die. I shivered nervously, and watched anxiously for the figure of my new found friend.

The mist rising from the water enveloped me, I could not distinguish a yard before my hand. I scrambled to my feet and called.

"Where are you, nurse? Nurse, where are you?"

No answer, only a faint rustle in the bushes, no answer. Dear Heaven, what is it?

A hand at my throat, a grip of iron round my waist.

"Help! Help!" I shriek. But the shriek dies into a moan as the relentless fingers tighten. A rift in the clouds above casts a gleam of light upon the path.

"The nurse!" I gasp. "The nurse!" And then the truth breaks in upon me. With cloak streaming in the wind, bonnet thrown aside, I see the face, the figure of my assailant. Not the nurse, not the sweet-voiced, fair-faced woman, but Rigby Starr. Starr, the most cunning, the most unscrupulous of the partners.

I cannot call, my voice is strangled in my throat. Closer he grips and closer, urging me nearer to the water's edge.

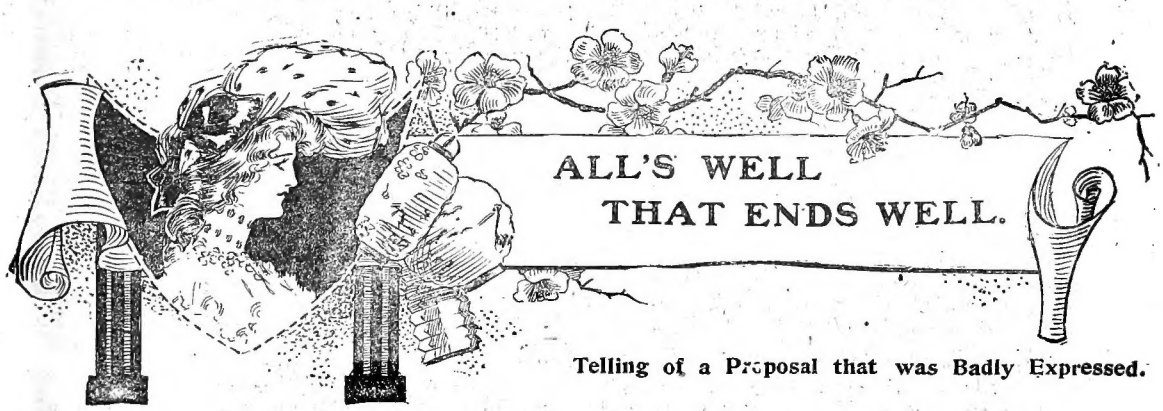
The river and the sky meet in a grey infinity; the swaying branches stretch into mocking fingers, pointing to my doom. I feel his hand upon my heart.

"The papers," he hisses, tearing at my bodice, "the papers—or——"

The ground slips from beneath my feet, the cruel waters hunger to lap my face. I strive with all the strength, the desperation of despair to keep him off, but I am helpless in his hands. Slowly but surely he forces me back. A wild desire for life, for love battles within me. I fight desperately, vainly against death.

The river closes over me, I am falling—drowning—lost!

(Another Episode next week.)



ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL.

Telling of a Proposal that was Badly Expressed.

Roy Manville and Daphne Ellesmere sat together in Lady Cazenove's conservatory. The murmur of fountains was in the air, and each little spray rose from its white marble basin like a quivering column of mother-of-pearl, rose-tinted by the soft-shaded, ruby lamps that hung above. Tall, broad palms spread their cool, green leaves, gracefully drooping at the tips, from sap-scented stems that rose up out of the moist mould in which they were bedded. The scent of orchids was wafted between the leaves of fern and palm, and the singing of birds in an invisible aviary made music more harmonious than even the brilliant orchestra in the distant ball-room.

Beauty such as this—soft, subdued, harmonious—is perhaps the most subtle and ravishing of all. Giving wing to one's imagination, it might have been just such a spot as this where, in the first beginning of all things, Romance had been cradled and nurtured, and Love had breathed the first breath of her undying life. And Roy Manville sat side by side with Daphne Ellesmere and looked, not at the blended beauties with which he was environed, but covertly and disturbedly at the girl beside him. Thus is the witching loveliness of nature dominated by a woman's smile!

"Miss Ellesmere," he said, after a pause, "I have asked you to accompany me here in order to prefer a request that has long occupied my thoughts."

A soft, pink blush tinted the whiteness of Daphne Ellesmere's cheeks, and a light, veiled in an instant, shone in her blue eyes. But of these things, too, Roy Manville was unconscious.

"The truth is," he went on hurriedly, "I love you very dearly, and have been bold enough to hope that you will consent to become my wife. I am not a poor man." He remembered, with some misgivings, that young Lord Seagrave had paid her marked attention of late, and though but a courtesy title, the holder of it was well known to be immensely rich. This had been the rift in Roy's lute for a long while, and he hastened to expatiate on his own fortunes. Love is not always clear-sighted.

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"I am not a poor man," he went on. "My income amounts to as much as two thousand a year, and I have other prospects upon which I may count with a tolerably good show of certainty. It is true, I have no title to bestow on you, but the lineage of my family is as unimpeachable as any that is represented to-night under Lady Cazenove's roof. Sir Cedric Manville fought side by side with William the Conqueror, and my ancestors have many times been chosen by their sovereigns for the bestowal of royal favours for services rendered both at court and in the field."

For an instant the light flashed again in Daphne's eyes. But it was not so soft and dreamy on this occasion. The flush, too, was this time more like the faintest indication of anger than of pleasure. But she made no reply, and Roy, regarding this as an unfavourable sign, went on as before.

"I know," he said, with slight embarrassment, "that there have been and still are many suitors for your hand, whose worldly position and prospects compare in many respects to mine with undeniable advantage. But if I admit this, I am at least conscious that, though in these respects you would be the loser, there are yet others where the advantages are upon my side."

Still Daphne Ellesmere maintained an uncompromising silence. There was now the very faintest indication of a curl at the corner of her ripe red lips. Was this Roy Manville, the very whisper of whose name had for more than a year sent a flush to her cheek and a sweet, shy longing into her young heart? Was this the love she had dreamt of as once to be hers—hoped for, in the secrecy of her own heart, as the glorious fulfilment of her life? Her spirit rose in revolt at this mercenary proposal, in which love but played the part of an auctioneer's hand-bell, calling the attention to bargains within. Even with herself, Daphne Ellesmere was honest, and she knew she had loved this man as she would love none other. But she had always believed he loved her. Even now a feeling that it was so lingered in her heart and would not be gainsaid. But if this were indeed true, why did he not say so honestly? Position, prospects, lineage, unimpeachable honour, comparison with other suitors—anything, everything but love! She was growing angry. But Roy suspected it not. Her silence seemed to indicate an under-current of hesitancy due to her doubts as to the indisputability of his qualifications, and he grew resentful at the thought.

Poor Roy! He loved this Daphne Ellesmere with all his honest young heart. She was his morning and evening star, the lodestone of his life, and the love he gave her was little short of absolute worship—the worship of a true man to a good, pure woman, whom he almost believes to partake of some higher gifts of spirituality not vouchsafed to other women. But he had long been troubled in mind. Life is full of strange and inexplicable contradictions. And here was one. His very humility made him boastful. He knew his own position was inferior to that of Lord Seagrave, whose admiration of Daphne Ellesmere could have but one termination. Comparatively speaking, he, Roy Manville, was a poor man beside this wealthy magnate. And the consciousness of this, accentuated by his innate humility, troubled him and made him doubtful of his own chances. And so he had crossed Lord Seagrave's Martini-Henri with his own little toy-pistol and tried to carry off the situation with advantage to himself. How much better would it have been had he gone unharmed!

"Miss Ellesmere," he said, his hands nervously pressed together on his knee, "this is a very serious matter with me. Will you honour me with your answer?"

This was a little better. But Daphne's spirit had been roused.

"I think," she said calmly, "that, under the circumstances, the proposal is one which, however it honours me, admits of but one answer. The position you have defined so accurately is one that holds no attraction for me. I am heartily glad to hear that your prospects are so promising. The other circumstances I knew before, and they are therefore no news to me. I think we had better drop the subject. Will you be so good as to escort me back to the ball-room?"

She rose as she spoke, and Roy, grinding his teeth in impotent anger and wretchedness, offered her his arm.

* * * * * *

It was a week later. Roy Manville sat moodily in the easiest of easy-chairs in his well-lighted sitting-room, and thought long and bitterly of his defeat. The real cause of that defeat, and the way in which he had himself hastened it, never for one moment occurred to him. Yet he was not a fool, but a thorough-going, good-principled, and, in all other respects, clear-sighted, young man. He was handsome, too, with short, crisp, curly-brown hair, and earnest hazel eyes, that looked fearlessly out upon all mankind.

Why had he been so blind? In his ignorant conceit, he had imagined that Daphne Ellesmere loved him, and now—well, it was all over now, and the fool's paradise in which he lived had vanished like any other figment of the imagination. He was very miserable about it all. Life would have been so bright with Daphne as his wife. And now—well, she would marry Lord Seagrave, and he—he would look on and hide his sorrow from the eyes of the curious.

A footman entered, bearing a card. Roy knitted his brows as he read the name inscribed thereon.

"All right," he said. "Show Mr. Ellesmere in."

The man retreated, and, a moment later, the visitor entered the room. He was a fair, boyish-looking young man of some two-and-twenty summers. Normally the face was frank and open, but to-day an expression of nervousness and embarrassment made this less noticeable. Roy looked up as he came in.

"Well, Bert," he said, "what on earth brings you here? I thought you were still cramming at Oxford."

Bertie Ellesmere shook his head.

"I'm supposed to be," he said dolefully. "But the truth is, I'm in a dickens of a mess."

"Ah!" said Roy understandingly. "Same old game, I suppose, Bert?"

Bertie nodded.

"How much is it this time?" inquired Roy, after a short pause.

"Two thousand," was the astounding reply.

Roy started, and he looked gravely over at his visitor.

"You're surely joking!" he said.

"Wish I was," responded Bertie, with a sigh. "I thought the thing was a dead cert. this time."

"You generally do," Roy observed quietly.

"Yes, I know," replied Bertie shamefacedly. "But I got regular inside information this time. Even the jockey had his money on her."

"Merely a blind, my boy," interrupted Roy.

The "boy" ignored the remark.

"I put every fraction I could rake together on the brute," he went on hopelessly. "Borrowed a bit more to make it a bigger thing still, and the bounder came in a bad fifth."

Again there was a long pause. Presently Roy asked:

"What are you going to do about it, Bert?"

Bertie shifted uneasily in his chair.

"God knows!" he said irreverently. "The governor would kick me out of the house if I told him. He said he would last time. That way is quite impossible. The mater hasn't got a hundred pounds in cash all told just now, so she can't help me. There's only one way out of it that I can see."

"What's that?" Roy asked quietly.

"Slope," was the brief reply.

Roy shook his head.

"Not a man's trick," he said decisively. "Surely an Ellesmere is not afraid to face the music, particularly when it is he himself who is responsible for it?"

Bertie coloured.

"Don't be hard on a chap," he said humbly. "I know I've been a fool, and if only I get can clear of this mess, the remembrance of it will be a lasting lesson to me."

Roy was silent. His thoughts flew back to Daphne. How

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her heart would ache if she knew of her brother's disgrace. He knew how dearly she loved this brother of hers, how she had screened and excused him on former occasions, how rejoiced she had been of late at his apparent studiousness and freedom from debt. And now he was in a worse plight than ever. The ruin he had up to this time averted was now inevitable. Then another thought occurred to him and his heart hardened.

"From one or two things that have come under my notice during the past week," he said, a little nervously, "I am inclined to think your sister Daphne has come to some understanding with Lord Seagrave. If this be so, it is more than probable that gentleman would not hesitate to help you out of the present difficulty. Particularly," he added, "if the matter was laid before him by the person most likely to influence his decision."

Even as he uttered the words, Roy hated himself for the thought which had inspired them. Bertie looked at him in wonderment.

"I think you're making a mistake, old fellow," he said. "But as it seems to me I have over-estimated your fund of sympathy for one so badly placed as myself, I will not intrude further."

He rose as he spoke, but Roy motioned him to the chair he had left.

"I beg your pardon, Bert," he said. "It was beastly of me. But you don't know all. I don't know what I'm talking about sometimes."

Bertie looked quickly into Roy's face, and a gleam of understanding came into his eyes.

"Ah!" he murmured inwardly. "So it's as bad as all that! Well, I should never have thought Daphne would have refused him."

"Bertie," said Roy, looking earnestly into his face, "does your sister know of this?"

"Yes," replied Bertie.

Roy sighed. Poor girl! He wished he could have spared her that.

"Well," he said, "will you give me your word of honour as a gentleman that you will never repeat this performance? You are a man now, Bert, old fellow, and you must recognise that the many and bitter humiliations which you are compelled to endure as a result of this reckless spirit of gambling are draining your moral character of all its manhood and sense of honour. The sum is a large one, even for me, but if you will give me your sacred promise to avoid such pitfalls in the future, I will make you out a cheque for the amount."

A flush—half of gladness, half of bewilderment—came into Bertie Ellesmere's face. For a moment he was almost dumfounded.

"Roy," he said, "do you really mean it? Why, the most I hoped of you was that you might be able in some way to show me how I could raise the money." His face shadowed a little. "I say, Roy," he added doubtfully, "I don't know how long it may be before I can hope to cancel the debt."

He tenderly folded her in his arms, and she laid her head on his breast.

Roy smiled.

"That will not be necessary," he said. "If you are not too proud to accept it, you shall have it freely. Only, I must have your promise."

Bertie's lip quivered.

"Oh, Roy," he said, "you are too good! Of course I promise. On my word of honour, this shall be the last time I give way to the temptation to gamble. I shall always remember how near ruin and disgrace I have been, and the memory shall make me strong."

Roy grasped him by the hand and shook it.

"One thing more," he said, and looked straight into the other's eyes.

"What is it?" asked Bertie.

"Don't—tell—Daphne!"

For a moment there was silence in the room. Then Bertie nodded his head.

"She's a good girl," he said warmly. "I once thought—but that was a mistake, I suppose."

Roy Manville felt the warm blood mantling his cheeks, but he paid no heed to the other's words. Drawing out his cheque-book he filled in and signed a cheque for £2,000, and handed it across to Bertie Ellesmere.

"God keep you straight from now on!" he said earnestly. And, half an hour later, the two men separated.

* * *

Another week had slipped—or rather dragged—by, a week of alternate depression and short-lived resolve for Roy Manville. There seemed no help for it all. Daphne's cold refusal of his love was as bitter to the taste as upon the night when it was uttered. What to do next had been his chief thought since, and at last he had made up his mind. He would go abroad.

The sunlight streamed in through the open windows of his room, and trunks, portmanteaux, valises, gun-cases, and other indispensable accessories to travel were strewn about the floor. He made it a rule to superintend his own packing, and to-day the occupation afforded him partial forgetfulness. He was trying to forget. But the attempt was a failure, and he admitted it to himself, though he still went on trying.

There was a tap at the door, and Bertie Ellesmere burst in upon him.

"Hullo, Roy," he exclaimed in surprise. "What the—where the—— I say, old chap, what's the meaning of all this? Not going away, are you?"

Roy nodded.

"Yes," he said, a trifle embarrassed by the interruption. "London's too beastly cold and wet for my liking. I'm going abroad."

"Where to?" asked Bertie.

"Oh, I don't know," was the somewhat vague reply. "I sha'n't touch the overdone continental resorts. Think I'll do a bit of big game hunting in Africa and South America. Anything for a change, you know."

Bertie Ellesmere regarded him quizzically. He thought

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he comprehended the meaning of this unexpected, and, to his mind, rather irrational exodus.

"Rather sudden, isn't it?" he asked, as he took a seat and watched the proceedings.

"Well, yes—that is, no. I've had it in mind for some time. I say, Bert, how did you get on about the other affair?"

Bertie Ellesmere's face flushed.

"Ah!" he said earnestly. "You were just in time to save me, Roy. I can't tell you how grateful I am to you."

Roy stopped him.

"Oh, that's all right," he said. "Glad to hear it's all square. Now I am going to forget all about it. It must always remain a secret between us, Bert."

"I sha'n't tell many people about it, as you can well believe," responded Bertie grimly. "It's scarcely the sort of thing one would care to advertise."

Roy nodded.

"Just so," he said—"all the better for me."

For fully five minutes there was silence. Then Bertie said:

"I say, Roy, don't think me impertinent, but have you and my sister quarrelled of late?"

Roy bent his head over a portmanteau.

"Oh, no," he said thickly. "We are the best of friends. What made you think of such a thing?"

"Don't know," said Bertie laconically. "I wondered, that's all."

He sat still for a while, and then got up to go. There was a twinkle in his eye as he held out his hand to bid Roy good-bye.

"Well," he said, "I must be going. Good luck, old fellow. I hope your big game will be bigger than you anticipate."

Roy grasped his hand warmly.

"Thanks," he said cordially. "Good-bye, Bert. Oh, I say. Er—you needn't allude at home to the fact that I'm—er—going away. Not that it matters much, but I'd rather you didn't."

Bertie Ellesmere maintained a stolid composure and lack of comprehension that did him credit.

"All right," he said. And with a farewell nod, he took his departure.

"What the dickens made him turn up?" grumbled Roy to himself as he tugged viciously at the straps of a too-distended trunk. "I was forgetting all about them. Just my luck. Well, I shall be out of the way by midnight, and then——" He broke off abruptly and applied himself energetically to the task before him. For nearly two hours he packed and ordered and grumbled and praised, and then, the work ended, he dismissed his assistants and sat down on a chair to consider what was to be done next. He looked very handsome as he sat there, with the glow of healthy exertion on his expressive face. And yet there was an indescribable air of melancholy about him that, in the eyes of some, might have added to rather than have detracted from his unquestionable attractiveness.

A slight noise roused him from his reflections. Turning, he saw the figure of Bertie Ellesmere, with the handle of the door in his hand, holding it open for someone to enter. The lad's face was expressionless, and he paid little or no heed to the astonished man within. A lady stepped into the room, and Bertie prepared to retire.

"Beg pardon, old chap," he said shamelessly. "But really, you know, the thing was impossible. Ta-ta! See you later." And he closed the door behind him.

With an effort Roy recovered his self-possession and offered his visitor a chair. She accepted it, and, seating herself, looked round on the evidences of coming departure.

"You are going away," she said reproachfully. "You might have told us of your intention, Mr. Manville."

Roy was nonplussed.

"I did not think you would care," he said simply.

Daphne looked up at him in protest.

"Well," she said, "we will let that pass. You were going away, however, without giving us the opportunity to thank you for a deed of generosity which we can never repay."

Roy coloured. He inwardly anathematised Bertie for his garrulity.

"That is of small consequence," he said shamefacedly. "And I fancy Bert has a curious notion of gratitude, since he has already violated one of the conditions imposed upon him."

Daphne smiled. It was a very sweet smile, and Roy trembled to the finger-tips as he met it.

"It is a violation of which I approve," she said. "He told me the very day you gave him your help so unreservedly. Every day since then I have been expecting you to call. You used to visit us at one time, Mr. Manville."

Roy was growing desperate. It seemed the best thing to face the matter boldly.

"How could I?" he said warmly. "How could I lightly forget the way in which you met my addresses a fortnight ago? I knew then, and know now even more thoroughly, that I am unworthy of you. You showed me that truth all too plainly. How could our relations remain unaltered after an experience so humiliating?"

Daphne Ellesmere studied the pattern on the carpet.

"Are you quite sure you were not somewhat to blame?" she asked.

Roy looked down at her in puzzled surprise.

"I—to blame?" he repeated in bewilderment. "Miss Ellesmere—Daphne—was I to blame because, loving you with my whole heart, I dared to hope that the wish of my life might be realised?"

"Pardon me," replied Daphne, still with her eyes on the carpet, "but, if my memory serves me right, you scarcely mentioned such a thing as love in your catalogue of matrimonial inducements. I have a dim idea that your rather highly-varnished account of your present position, future prospects, and past lineage precluded any such sentimental admission on your part."

Roy stood quite still as he listened to the words. And then he saw it all—the mistake he had made—the too-important place he had given to worldly considerations, the too-trivial one to love. She wanted bread, and he had offered her a stone. And his jealousy of Lord Seagrave had done it all. Love was uppermost now, and he gave it the secondary place no longer.

"Daphne," he said tenderly, "is there any hope for me yet? I was a fool to speak thus to you. But I knew Lord Seagrave meant to ask you to be his wife, and I could think of nothing but the advantages he possessed over me. I was terribly afraid you would influence your choice by those advantages, and that made me expatiate on my own poor position. I forgot that, to a woman such as you, there is an inducement higher than all such as these—love. So I made my love subservient to my position. It was hard even to do this, for even as I enlarged on my prospects, my heart cried out for utterance. But I was afraid. Oh, Daphne, tell me, dear, is there one small chance for me even yet? I do love you, darling—love you with an intensity of devotion that swallows up every other thought. Say there is yet hope."

She held out both her hands to him, and he tenderly lifted her from the chair upon which she sat. Then he folded her in his arms and she laid her head upon his shoulder.

"Oh, why didn't you come?" she pouted. "I waited for you so impatiently."

"I was a fool," he said in self-condemnation. "But why did you come?" he asked her in return.

Daphne laughed.

"It was a case of Mahomet and the Mountain," she said archly.

At that instant Bertie Ellesmere put his head in at the door. He gave utterance to a prolonged whistle, and, in deference to what he beheld, closed the door once more.

Roy laughed, and said:

"That was the cheapest two thousand pounds' worth I ever had in my life. But the boy is a rascal nevertheless."

Walter J. Mowbray.

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JUDGED IN HASTE.

Showing how Easily Troubles Pass Away.

"It is a shame, a burning shame," cried Kittie Wayne, as she looked up from the letter in her hand, and dashed away the indignant tears which had gathered thickly on her long, dark lashes.

"What is a shame?" asked a soft, languid voice, and a tall, handsome young man, with dark blue eyes and a fair moustache, came out from under the shade of the elm trees which bordered the road, and leant carelessly over the garden-gate near which Kittie stood.

"Oh, Leslie!" exclaimed Kittie, with a quick blush, and smiling through her tears. "I didn't know you were there! When did you come?"

"Just a moment ago," answered Leslie Earl, "and when I saw you coming down the walk, reading that letter, I concluded to wait here for you. I prefer to interview you here," with a wave of his hand that took in rose-bushes, elms, and circular beds of heliotrope and verbenas, "to stifling in that abominable, stuffy little parlour."

Kittie laughed, then grew sober instantly.

"Tell me what troubles you, Kittie?" said Leslie. "I have a right to know your every thought now."

"I am not so sure about that," said Kittie; "but of course I will tell you this, for it may affect our future very materially. I may not be able to marry you, after all, Leslie, for mother may need me to work for her."

"I will work for your mother if anything of the sort is necessary," said Leslie. "I certainly sha'n't give you up, no matter what happens. But I understood from you that your mother was comfortably situated on a farm somewhere."

"But she is to lose the farm," said Kittie. "I was wondering why I did not hear from her, for she usually writes me a letter twice a week, but I never imagined anything was wrong. And now, after waiting ten days, I get the worst kind of answer. My cousin Asa, with whom my mother and two sisters have had a home for twelve years, died a week ago, after an illness of only a few hours, and he has left the farm, live-stock, and all his money, to Ebenezer Cranch, the son of his only sister. Mother is to have only the furniture of the house. Isn't it a shame? How *could* he be so cruel! And what *is* mother to do?"

"One question at a time, please," said Leslie, "and give me some explanation. I don't exactly understand. Why should this Ebenezer Cranch—beautiful name, I must say—have the property? What was the nature of his claim on your cousin?"

"He had none at all save his relationship," said Kittie emphatically. "More than twenty years ago—before I was born—he lived with my cousin Asa at the farm for a time. But his father was a worthless, wretched creature, who would never stay long in one place, and he soon took his wife and boy away, and Asa never saw them afterwards. When father died, my cousin sent for mother, and gave us all a home. He was very old, and she gave him the most devoted care, and now he has left everything to that Ebenezer Cranch. Why, he didn't even know where he lived! He left directions with a lawyer to find him!"

"It *is* a shame," said Leslie slowly. "I don't blame you for feeling badly, Kittie. But perhaps it will all come out right in the end. Don't worry."

"How *can* it come right?" cried Kittie. "Oh, that hateful Ebenezer Cranch!"

"Now, that isn't just," said Leslie. "He isn't to blame for his uncle's whim, you know, and he may be a very good sort of fellow."

"I doubt it," said Kittie. "Probably a gawky, ugly, disagreeable fellow, who will make himself hated at Merrifield. And of course he won't have ambition or brains enough to manage the farm. It will all run to decay."

Leslie laughed

'Come, now, Kittie," he said; "let me make a prophecy. You'll throw me over and save the farm for your mother yet by marrying that very Ebenezer Cranch."

"I wouldn't have him if he was covered with diamonds," said Kittie. "And you know, Leslie, that I wouldn't give you up for any other man living."

"Dear love," said Leslie, kissing her, "I know how true you are. But still," with a teasing laugh, "I do feel a little shaky when I think of the fascinating Ebenezer."

"You may be sure I sha'n't sleep a wink to-night for thinking of him," said Kittie. "Of course he will turn mother out, and where is she to go?"

"Come in and sing to me," said Leslie, "and forget all about Ebenezer."

So arm-in-arm they walked up the tree-bordered path, and entered the house, where Kittie tried to coax some melody from the wheezy little piano which Mrs. Smith had bought in her girlhood.

Kittie was the teacher of the district school, of which the Rev. Mr. Smith was a trustee, and Leslie was a lawyer in the large town of Castlebury, two miles distant. He had an excellent practice, and was well able to support a wife; so when he fell in love with pretty Kittie Wayne, there were no difficulties in the way of an early marriage. The wedding had been fixed for the last week in June, for Kittie's school closed on the 15th, and she had intended to be married from her cousin's home in Merrifield. But now death had changed her plans very materially; and after Leslie had listened to all the ballads with which Kittie was familiar, he easily persuaded her to promise to be married quietly from the good clergyman's at the time appointed.

"It is unlucky to postpone a wedding," said he, as he argued the question, "and, of course, you can do a great deal more for your mother when you are my wife. Who knows we may outwit that Ebenezer Cranch yet."

"No such good luck," said Kittie. "There's no chance for a law case, is there?"

Of course Kittie waited very anxiously for her next letter from Merrifield, and when it came she read it with tears of thanksgiving, for Ebenezer Cranch's lawyers had written to say

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that Mrs. Wayne and her daughters need not move immediately from the farm, as possession would not be taken for several weeks.

"So, you see, the ugly Ebenezer is not as hateful as you imagined," said Leslie, when Kittie read him her mother's letter.

"He's only making a convenience of mother," said Kittie, who was too prejudiced to be just. "Of course, if he couldn't take the farm at once he didn't want it deserted."

"He's a bold, bad man," said Leslie. "There's no doubt of it. I suppose you wouldn't let even Hannah look on him favourably."

"Never!" said Kittie, tossing her curls. "Hannah is far too good for such a wretch."

"But she might keep the farm if——"

"Not at such a sacrifice," interrupted Kittie. "Please don't talk about the man, Leslie; you know how I hate him."

The day before her wedding Kittie received another letter from Merrifield. Mrs. Wayne sorrowed over her inability to be present on the great occasion, and wished her daughter every happiness. She concluded by saying that Ebenezer Cranch's lawyer had written to say that his client and wife would be at Merrifield a week or two later, but requesting that Mrs. Wayne would remain in the house until their arrival.

"Poor Hannah's last chance is gone," said Leslie, when Kittie told him what her mother had written. "She can't save the farm by marrying her foe, it seems, as he has a wife already."

"To think that *any* girl should have been willing to marry *him!*" said Kittie.

The wedding came off with due pomp and ceremony; for Mrs. Smith had insisted on giving a substantial breakfast to the guests, and the vicar had taken pains to invite every one for miles around. There was much feasting and merry-making, and Mr. and Mrs. Leslie Earl left Castlebury 'mid a shower of rice and old slippers. They were to take a honeymoon tour for a fortnight, and then return home by way of Merrifield, for Kittie was very anxious to see her mother and sisters.

"And if you desire it, Kittie," said Leslie, indulgently, "we will carry mother, Hannah and little Margie back with us to our own home."

"I don't see anything else to be done just at present," said Kittie; "but I don't like to burden you with the support of so many, Leslie. Oh, that hateful Ebenezer Cranch! If he had never existed, mother would have had the farm for her own."

* * * * *

It was a warm day in the middle of July when the newly-married couple reached Merrifield. Kittie had written to Hannah to meet them at the railway station and that worthy spinster, who was a dozen years older than the bride, was duly there with a horse and trap.

"Oh, Hannah, I am so glad to see you!" cried Kittie, as she rushed to embrace her sister.

"But didn't the Cranches come?" asked Hannah.

"The Cranches?" repeated Kittie wonderingly.

"Yes, they were to come to-day," said Hannah. "I received a letter from the lawyer last night."

"How unfortunate," said poor Kittie. "I hoped to escape them. I know I sha'n't be able to treat them with common civility."

"But they haven't come," said Hannah, as the train steamed away, leaving only an old man and a dog on the platform. "I suppose they changed their minds."

"I am glad they did," said Kittie, as she climbed into the trap. "I hope it may never be my lot to look upon the face of that hateful Ebenezer Cranch."

The farmhouse was soon reached, and the tears sprang to Kittie's eyes as she noted the beauty of the fertile field stretching away on either side of it, and the luxuriance of the shrubbery in the garden. For she thought how soon the place was to pass into the hands of strangers

A well-spread table, loaded with everything in the way of eating that the farm could afford, awaited the hungry travellers in the great cool kitchen, where the large windows were shaded by fragrant honeysuckle vines and the door screened from the sun by stately elms nearly a century old.

But Kittie's brow contracted as she saw that there were plates laid for seven.

"You see, we fully expected Ebenezer Cranch and his wife," said Mrs. Wayne.

"I am not anxious to see the woman who could marry Ebenezer Cranch," said Kittie. "The man and the name combined would be the death of any ordinary mortal."

When supper was over, Leslie went out into the garden to smoke a cigar, leaving his wife to talk to her mother and sister. And Kittie had plenty to talk about, for it had been almost a year since she had left home to take charge of the district school near Castlebury. She was in the midst of an account of her wedding when Leslie came suddenly in at the kitchen-door.

"The Cranches have come," he said abruptly.

"The Cranches!" repeated four feminine voices in different tones of surprise.

"Yes; come into the parlour and see them," said he.

"Are they in the parlour? Did you let them in?" asked Hannah. "I wonder how they happened to come at this time. I know there is no train after five o'clock, and it is nearly seven now."

"Oh, Leslie, what are they like?" asked Kittie.

"The wife is a very pretty little woman," answered Leslie. "But Ebenezer is a great, ugly, awkward, fellow," laughing.

"I knew it," cried Kittie. "I had an intuition that he would be like that. You know I always said so, Leslie."

"You'd better come into the parlour," said Leslie. "It isn't polite to leave them alone so long," and he led the way through the hall, followed by the four women.

"Where are they?" asked Kittie, as they entered the parlour; for the room was empty. "Oh, Leslie, how could you hoax us so!"

He slipped his arm round his wife's waist, and drew her before a large mirror which hung between the two front windows.

"That is Ebenezer Cranch's wife," he said, nodding toward Kittie's reflection. "Don't you think her a pretty little woman? Bow to her and tell her you're ashamed of having abused her so."

"Leslie, what on earth do you mean?" cried Kittie. "Have you gone crazy?"

"Not in the least," said Leslie. "Sit down and I will explain matters to your entire satisfaction, I trust."

When they were all seated about him, he said:

"My father's name was Stephen Earl, and I was named Ebenezer Leslie, after some revered ancestor, I suppose. When I was only a year old my mother married Samuel Cranch, and very naturally I was called by the name of my stepfather as I grew up. We lived for several years on this farm with my uncle, and then my step-father moved to Sussex. There he deserted my mother, who died a year later. I was old enough then to appreciate the wrongs she had suffered, and I promptly dropped the name of the man I had learnt to despise and hate, and took my own. I never had liked the name of Ebenezer, so I thought I might as well drop that too. So I began again as Leslie Earl, and have been called so ever since. It was a great surprise to me to hear that my uncle had left me his property, and a still greater surprise to learn that the young lady to whom I was engaged to be married was my uncle's second cousin. And when I heard her abuse poor Ebenezer Cranch so fiercely I determined to play a practical joke on her. Tell me, Kittie, do you think I succeeded? And how do you like the appearance of 'the hateful Ebenezer'?"

In spite of her chagrin at having been so completely hoaxed, Kittie felt that she could afford to be teased, for the termination of her troubles was as happy as thee lose of a fairy tale.

Florence Hallowell.

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LOVED and ACQUITTED.

Telling How a Girl Saved Her Sweetheart.

"Oh, dry up, Oswald, for everybody's sake. You are for ever on that old subject of yours."

"Well, Frank, the danger was never greater that it is at the present day. Everywhere women are taking positions at small salaries to the detriment of men who have families to keep."

"Can't you find some fresh arguments, Oswald. Yours are getting a bit stale now."

Then Frank Becher made a frantic rush to escape the heavy, chastening hand of Oswald Gray, his future brother-in-law.

Oswald enjoyed the reputation of being a first-rate fellow, but a bit of a crank on the subject of women working in positions that men had once occupied. He was engaged to be married to Lilian Becher, to whom he was passionately attached.

The Becher family only consisted of three—Mrs. Becher, her daughter Lilian, aged twenty-one years, and her son Frank, aged nineteen. Mr. Becher had died many years before, and Mrs. Becher lived on the dividends which his invested wealth yielded.

When Frank Becher left school Oswald Gray had obtained for him a position in Messrs. Pole, Mannering & Co., where he himself was accountant.

Oswald and Lilian had been engaged nearly two years but they did not contemplate marriage until Frank was in a fair position so that Lilian would have no qualms in leaving her mother.

As Frank left the room somewhat hastily to avoid being assisted by Oswald, he almost ran into his sister who was entering the room. Oswald came forward to greet her.

"Why, Lilian," he said, "how pale you look, whatever is the matter?"

"I am afraid I shall upset you if I tell you, Oswald."

"But I would rather hear it, dear. Tell me."

Lilian's face became even more pale, but a determined look shone in her eyes as she said:

"I have accepted a berth as typine with Messrs. T. Austin & Co., the india-rubber merchants." She glanced up almost defiantly as she spoke. He saw the look, but did not put it down to nervousness, which would have been correct, but interpreted it as a defiance of his opinions.

"Why have you done this? You know how much I dislike it," he asked in an angry tone. It was the wrong attitude to adopt, and immediately she was on her mettle.

"My dear Oswald, I am surely at liberty to do as I please to some extent."

"Particularly if it is against my wishes, I suppose?" was his bitter retort.

"Oh, Oswald, how ridiculous you are!" she cried, stamping her foot in vexation.

"Very likely," he responded, now quite angry. "But you will either choose to do as I wish or our ways must part."

She started to her feet and confronted him with flashing eyes.

"Then I will choose," she cried, her anger at his unreasonableness quite carrying her away. She snatched off his ring, he took it, bowed slightly, and then the door slammed and he was gone.

The noise of the door seemed to wake up her senses. "Oswald, Oswald," she cried, and then covered her face in an agony of grief. Whilst he, in a blind rage, stalked on and on, regardless of direction.

So Oswald Gray and Lilian Becher parted, and pride kept them apart, whilst their hearts ached and they craved for one another.

At Pole, Mannering & Co's., Frank Becher treated his senior with silent contempt, for he felt that the quarrel was a family one. A sensible youth would have been the means of patching it up, but Frank apparently was not sensible.

As accountant to his firm, who were furniture manufacturers in a large way, Oswald had a great deal of money constantly passing through his hands, and his work was of a most responsible nature.

He dragged through the days after his quarrel with Lilian, wishing that each of them might be the last.

It was on the fourth day after the parting that Oswald received a message to go to the principal's room. He found that the manager of the bank was with Mr. Mannering when he arrived. The head of the firm was a tall, slightly built man, with very dark hair and eyes, always giving one the impression that he was in need of shaving.

"Can you explain that, Mr. Gray?" he said, placing a drawn cheque in front of him.

Oswald glanced at it and saw that the cheque was drawn to "bearer," and that the amount was £200.

"No," he said as he handed it back, "I have no recollection of drawing it."

"Neither have I any recollection of signing it."

Oswald glanced in surprise at Mr. Mannering and then examined the cheque again. It was signed "Harry Mannering" and apparently was in the handwriting of Mr. Mannering.

"What do you take it to be, Mr. Gray?"

"It looks like a private cheque of your own, sir."

"Examine it more carefully."

"Why," exclaimed Gray after a minute or two, "this does not appear to be your own writing, but it is a remarkably fine imitation!"

"Exactly what we think," drily assented Mr. Mannering. "But then I did not sign the cheque, neither was I here on

Monday when the cheque was apparently drawn and cashed, and you and I are the only persons who could get at the cheque book. If you will look, you will see that the counter-foil has been taken completely out."

"You surely do not mean to insinuate ——" cried Oswald, and then he stopped, glancing from one to the other.

"I do not see any other course," said Mr. Mannering. The matter has been in the hands of a private detective since yesterday morning and he has stated that everything points to——" Mr. Mannering paused and shrugged his shoulders.

"But it's absurd," cried Oswald, trying to laugh but making a ghastly failure. "You surely do not believe it?"

"But, Mr. Gray, the case is a very simple one. Two persons have access to a cheque book, a private one only occasionally used. A cheque is drawn and cashed. You and I are the two persons, and it is out of the question that I should forge my own name, isn't it?"

"Now, Gray," he went on, "own up to it. It will be better in the long run."

"But I haven't anything to own up to," protested Gray. "Won't you believe me—I did not take the money."

"Well," said Mr. Mannering, "I was prepared to help you out—if you still persist, I have only one course open. I cannot afford to throw £200 away."

As he spoke, the door opened, and the plain-clothes officer from Scotland Yard entered.

"I arrest you, Oswald Gray," he said, "on a charge of forging the name of your employer."

"Great Heaven! But I am quite innocent. Mr. Mannering, you do not think me guilty?" cried Gray.

"I do not know what to think, but the evidence is very strong."

So they led Oswald Gray away.

As a matter of fact the bank manager who had discovered the forgery had practically been the means of Oswald's arrest. There had existed a bitter animosity between the two men for many years, and the manager was not slow to take advantage of this opportunity. He knew he could easily persuade Mr. Mannering, and so the most decisive steps were taken.

Lilian was prostrate at the news, and refused to believe that Oswald was guilty; whilst her brother openly jeered at him, and complimented Lilian on being well rid of a scoundrel.

But now she yearned for Oswald more than ever. Now that he had met adversity she longed to be by his side to comfort him, but still that pride prevented her. And Oswald, well, Oswald began to despair of everything. First Lilian and then this cruel blow—both seeming so unjust to him. He would have given much to have had Lilian beside him in this time of trouble; but as with her, his pride would not submit.

Once the law had got Oswald Gray in its grip, Mr. Mannering began to regret his hastiness. Gray had been in his employ for fourteen years with never a suspicion against his fair name. But it was too late to retract, the law must take its course.

At last the day of the trial came round. The court was fairly full of people, for the continuation of a much-tried case was to follow the trial of Oswald Gray.

Frederick Furrian had been engaged on behalf of the prisoner, whilst Lionel Lincoln was the prosecuting counsel.

From the first everything seemed to go against Oswald Gray. From the fact that he alone besides Mr. Mannering had access to the safe, down to the fact that the particular character in the signature which had caused the forgery to be discovered very much resembled the identical character in the prisoner's handwriting. In the correct signature the two letters "N" occurring together in "Mannering" were exactly similar, whereas in the counterfeit the second "N" differed somewhat.

Lincoln made out a very strong case against Oswald Gray, whilst Furrian's defence, although it was clever and well delivered, lacked material. Consequently in the judge's summing up it was clear that his opinion had gone right against Oswald.

Presently the jury retired but were only absent for about five minutes.

"We find the prisoner guil——"

"Stop!"

It was the defending counsel's voice; he was waving a paper in his hand.

"My lord," he cried, "I regret this irregularity, but the most important evidence has just been handed to me."

There was some commotion in the court, but presently everyone had settled down, and then Furrian commenced:

"My Lord and Gentlemen of the Jury. On the purely circumstantial evidence put forward by the most learned counsel for the prosecution, we were within an ace of committing a great error of justice.

"My lord, I hold in my hand the written confession of the real culprit, but, as it is the desire of all parties concerned that his name should be suppressed, I will pass it to your lordship to read."

The judge read the confession as did the jury. It was a perfectly legal document, sworn before witnesses, and setting forth the details of how the robbery and subsequently the forgery was committed.

Thus Oswald Gray was discharged without a stain on his character, although he was bound over to appear if called upon at some future date.

Oswald could hardly believe the truth until he read the signature of the man who had committed the forgery. But he did not seem particularly astonished, his solicitor thought, only sad. But as soon as he was free from the necessary legalities, he hurried home to think.

At home that evening he found a letter from Mr. Mannering, who had been in the court. In it he suggested that Oswald took a month's leave of absence, whilst he trusted that the inclosed would help him further to enjoy it—"the inclosed" consisted of a cheque for £50. Mr. Mannering further went on to say how bitterly he regretted the step he had taken, and apparently his sorrow was quite sincere.

On the following day there came over Oswald an intense longing to see Lilian again. To gaze into her blue eyes and read the love message there. To feel her heart beating against his. Pride was conquered now, and he hurried with all speed to the Becher's home. The door was opened by Mrs. Becher.

"Oswald!" she cried. "You?"

"Yes, Mrs. Becher, I've come to beg pardon from Lilian."

"She is not home yet from business."

The words caused Oswald a momentary pang, but he took the thrust smilingly.

"You'll come in, won't you, Oswald?"

"Do you think she will see me?"

"Oh, yes, she will only be too glad of some comfort."

"Ah, I was forgetting your trouble in my own cares. How is Frank, where is he, do you know?"

"The last we heard of him was that he was on his way to Buenos Ayres. My poor misguided boy, and to think that you nearly paid the penalty of his crime."

"But how was he found out?"

"Lilian discovered it. He came home with the story of your arrest, and his effusive liking for you immediately turned the other way, just like his father used to be. Two or three days afterwards Lilian entered his room rather suddenly and surprised him locking up a desk, and she was sure she caught the glint of gold; he flushed very much, and went on at her for going about so silently.

"Next day Lilian lifted the desk and found it much heavier than usual, she shook it, but he had foreseen such a contin-

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gency, though he anticipated an accidental one only, and had put in paper to prevent the rattle.

"He bought some new clothes and a diamond pin for his tie, besides various other things, until Lilian could restrain herself no longer, and next day she forced open his desk and found almost one hundred and eighty pounds in gold and notes. When he came home she accused him, he blustered and protested, but eventually confessed.

"The following morning she made him sign his confession, but immediately afterwards fainted away. While she was unconscious Frank slipped away with the money, and this morning we got a letter from him to say that he was on board a tramp steamer bound for Buenos Ayres.

"Directly Lilian recovered, she hurried to the court with the confession and the rest you know. What with your quarrel and Frank's behaviour, the girl is quite wearing herself out."

Oswald's expression grew more doleful with each sentence of this explanation, and at the finish he was calling himself every name he could think of.

Mrs. Becher had gone upstairs to lie down, and Oswald paced up and down the dining-room like a caged panther.

"Will she never come?" he cried. He consulted his watch on an average every minute and a half. She was not due in till six o'clock, and it still wanted a quarter of an hour till then.

At last he heard the latchkey in the front door, and heard Lilian coming down the passage to the dining-room.

She opened the door, and started at seeing a man's form before her. She stared for a moment as though she could not believe her eyes, but only for a moment. Then with a glad little cry she was in his strong embrace.

"Oh, Oswald," she cried, "my Oswald; I've wanted you so much." But the reaction had been too much, and her tears began to flow. Tenderly he soothed her, and kissed her tear-bedewed eyes.

"Oswald," she said presently, "I have something to tell you. It is why I went against your wishes and accepted Mr. Austin's offer of employment.

"You know mother's money was invested in the Lode Star Diamond Mines, well, the company were in low water at the last meeting, and were unable to declare a dividend. Consequently, the regular income which mother received stopped, and it was thought that the company would have to go into liquidation, then I thought it time to put my hand to the mill."

"My poor dear Lil, how I misjudged you," he cried remorsefully. "But our marriage must take place at once, my income is quite large enough for all three of us."

"Impetuous boy," she laughingly said. "You haven't heard all yet. Last week a very rich find was made, and mother's solicitor sold all the shares at an immense profit, and reinvested them in Government stock. He sent a cheque, too, for £200 to Mr. Mannering yesterday, and I leave business next Saturday week, dear."

"Anyhow," he cried, "I cannot wait about any longer for you, love. More things will be happening if I do. How will next month do?"

"Of all the ridiculous old things, next year, you mean," she retorted.

But eventually they brought it down to September which was four months ahead. Thus once again that truest of all sayings proved itself—"The course of true love never runs smooth."

But a very pretty wedding took place early in September, and a radiantly happy pair left London *en route* for Jersey.

One thing more and my story is finished. From the first Oswald Gray suspected Frank Becher. He had lent him his keys, including the key of the safe, to open a drawer with. He had noticed that Frank was some time gone, but excused himself by saying that the key would not work properly at first. Oswald thought nothing more of it until his interview with Mr. Mannering, and then he remembered it, but for Lilian's sake he kept silent, and would have suffered for another in order to spare her ignominy and shame. But she never knew of it, and I only relate it now with the idea of dispelling the rather adverse opinion which I am afraid my lady readers may have formed of Oswald Gray. **E. Newton Bungey.**

Your Editor Chats.

I AM very glad to find that my new features, and especially the development in the pictorial covers, are so popular among my readers, and very many have written me congratulatory messages concerning them.

One of my numerous correspondents is "J. G. R.," Streatham, who in the course of a long epistle, says, "I have been greatly interested in 'The Bridge of Ruin,' and am sorry that it is now completed. It is a story which should warn all inclined to gamble. I was much amused, however, at one part of the story, *i.e.*, the taking of the snapshots. I presume the games were played in a room, *and in the evening.*" He then goes on to say that this is impossible from a photographic point of view. His assumption that the snapshots were taken in the evening is wrong, for in the number in which the episode is related, that of August 22nd, it distinctly states that they were playing *in the afternoon.* However, I thank "J. G. R." for his well-meaning criticism, and I feel sure that if he turns up that issue he will agree with me that he is under a misapprehension.

YOU will all, no doubt, appreciate this week's instalment of "The Pursuit of Sara." A great feature is the reproduction of photographs showing the actual places where the principal incidents occurred, and these, although, of course, of special interest to readers in and around Bedford, will be interesting to all readers. I am pursuing the same course in respect to Northampton, the next town in which Sara undergoes many exciting experiences, which she relates in next week's number. On the cover of this issue is depicted the scene at Newnham Bridge, where Rigby Starr makes so cowardly an assault upon Sara. There will be an equally striking picture on the cover next week. I anticipate that there will be a big demand for "SHORT STORIES" in Northampton and environs next week, so regular readers there had better ask their newsagents to reserve them a copy, so as to prevent the disappointment of hearing them say "Sold out."

BESIDES the thrilling relations of "The Pursuit of Sara," a splendid new attraction starts in our next. This is Mr. George Griffith's serial "A Criminal Millionaire," which is bound to create much interest. Very little need be said in recommending this to readers, because the author is so well known as a writer of stirring stories. "Good wine needs no bush," is an apt quotation, and hence I need not dissertate on the merits of our coming serial. You might, however, do your friends a good turn by mentioning what I have in hand for them, and thereby oblige me too.

A GOOD many correspondents have written me inquiring whether any more "Love Problems" will appear. They intimate that they would be sorry to see this feature dropped, but I can calm their fears by announcing that shortly some more of these interesting problems will be published. In reply to "Perplexed," the number containing "Should a Husband Discuss His Business Affairs With His Wife?" was the one dated September 12th of this year.

OWING to a printer's error one of the admitted solutions to No. 141 in the Juggled Letters Competition was given as Gilgach; this should have been Gilfach. I hope to be able to announce the names of the prizewinners shortly.

Your Editor.

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The Story of an Attempt at Matchmaking and its Result.

"Yes, I like the look of the young fellow very much," said Mr. James Reece frankly. "Then we may take it as a compact, Will, that the young people marry. You've seen my daughter, and you think that she would make a suitable wife for Charlie?"

"I think that the marriage should prove an ideal one!" cried Mr. William Crewe in a tone of conviction. "It would be very pleasant to both of us if the young people were to make a match of it. There are the two estates side by side; they would make a capital whole, if under one master. I cannot claim that my family has lived on my estate for ever so many generations, because I haven't had it two years, but that doesn't make any difference. Well, we will each do his best to bring it about, but it must be quite a question of free will. No coercion!"

"I wouldn't coerce Lucy for anything!" declared Mr. Reece emphatically. "Still, we can do a great deal to bring about the desired end. We can throw them together; we can make judicious remarks, and so on. Oh, I think it will come about, Will. You know, it is association that has a great deal to do with falling in love! If a man never sees a certain woman, he doesn't fall in love with her—how on earth can he? And, on the other hand, if he constantly sees a certain woman, it's about three dozen to one that he will fall in love with her. That sort of thing happens every day, under conditions that seem to preclude the possibility of marriage. Therefore, the chances are greater when the two parties are—well, attractive."

"Precisely!" agreed the other parent.

The matter dropped at that point, so far as actual discussion went, but both fathers set to work to accomplish the object in view. Reece and Crewe were friends. They had been to school together and had kept more or less in touch with one another during the succeeding years, although they had been separated for the greater portion of them.

Reece had spent a considerable time in various Colonies, in the Government service, while Crewe had devoted himself to business in the mother country. The Reece estate had been kept in hand by his sister during his sojourn abroad, but her death had had something to do with his return and his decision to settle down and take matters easily.

Reece was delighted when he discovered that the adjoining property had been acquired by his friend, and it was not long before the two men began to think of matrimonial plans for their offspring.

However, the respective son and daughter did not view the matter in the same light, for it was not long before the young people saw the drift of certain broad hints, and perceived the object of sundry excursions and invitations. If the hints had not been so broad, Charles Crewe and Lucy Reece might have fallen in love as a matter of course, but when they discovered that they were being thrust on one another, as Lucy mentally termed it, their independent spirits rebelled against the plan and they deliberately made up their minds that they were not going to be disposed of like so much furniture. The natural result was that there was no progress in the direction of matrimony and the fathers looked at each other in dismay.

"They don't seem to take to one another, do they?" observed Mr. Crewe dolefully. "It's rather disquieting, isn't it?"

"It's *very* disappointing," emphasised Mr. Reece. "Yet," he added, brightening a little, "it's not altogether a bad sign, you know! They have guessed our plans and it has ruffled them a bit, probably! That will wear off, and they will fall in love as deeply as—as——"

Mr. Reece could not find a simile, so he lamely desisted.

Then they hit on a plan for throwing the young people more together for a time. Crewe intended to have various extensive alterations carried out in his house; this work necessitated that father and son should go away from the house for a time, and take up their abode at a hotel. Reece invited the Crewes to stay with him and his daughter during the progress of the work. Charlie Crewe, who had taken over the active management of his father's office in Manchester, an hour's ride from home, would find himself just as conveniently situated as in his father's house.

Thus it came about that Charlie and Lucy, already somewhat antagonistic, found themselves in closer proximity, which tended to increase their antagonism. To make matters worse, although he thought that it was doing quite the opposite, Mr. Crewe said that Charlie needn't go up more than three days a week as business was always flat at that time of the year, and they could all have a good time.

It was the third day after the Crewes had installed themselves in the home of the Reeces. Lucy entered the library to get a book on geology and she found Charlie lazily reclining in an armchair, reading the latest novel and smoking a cigar. He was the picture of indolence.

"Can I get it for you, Miss Reece?" he inquired, rising slowly and speaking in the tone of a man who hoped that a negative reply would be given. He received the negative answer but with an addition which he did not expect.

"No, thank you, Mr. Crewe! I should not like to cause you any undue exertion! Pray remain seated!"

"You are so dreadfully energetic, Miss Reece!" he drawled, sinking back into the comfortable chair. "I suppose *that*, and the fondness for fossils, come from living in the Colonies! I admire your energy and your studious disposition, but I cannot imitate them, I regret to say!" Then, lowering his eyes so that the malicious twinkle in them should not be seen, he added: "Are you going to keep me company by sitting here to study?"

"I should not like to disturb the profundity of your reading, Mr. Crewe!" she retorted, flushing. She bowed and passed out of the room.

"By Jove!" muttered Charlie. "I am afraid I was a bit rude, but she was not behindhand! Well; I think I am making myself appear something of a dolt to her, and she won't be in a hurry to say 'yes!' when I pop the question, as I must do just to please dad. He'll be cut up about it, but I can't help it!"

Charlie Crewe presented himself to Lucy as an indolent fellow, rather shallow in mind, and bordering on the fop; not at all the kind of man to maintain and increase a large business. She preferred a man of the masterly type; strong of body and brain, morally and physically brave, capable of facing and overcoming all difficulties. To her, therefore, this Charles Crewe was the opposite of her choice of a husband.

Lucy did not perceive that he was exaggerating, that he was not really what he showed himself to her, yet she ought to have guessed it, considering that she herself was playing a similar game of exaggeration. Lucy was not the blue-stocking which she made Charlie think she was; she had a liking for study and she enjoyed athletic exercises, but at heart she was essentially homely and womanly. Her disposition was gentle, tender, and she preferred the work of a home to the study of

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fossils, and the work of a geologist with hammer and other appliances. Instead of being really the rather masculine, independent, "stand-offish" girl, she was yearning for a strong arm to protect her.

They kept up the play whenever they met and they believed in the truth of one another's acting. When alone, each smiled at his, or her, success and experienced increased dislike for the other party. It was a game of cross purposes with a vengeance, and the cherished desires of the fathers were suffering in consequence.

Mr. Crewe and Mr. Reece both felt constrained to say something, when, after more than a week had passed, there was no result. Crewe had an interview with his son, in which he delicately made the young fellow aware of the fact that his own desire was no nearer realisation, and Charlie evasively stated that it was his intention to ask Lucy to be his wife if—the elder man did not notice the significance of the remark—if she would have him! In his mind he was sure that he was making acceptance impossible. Reece, on the other hand, told his daughter that he feared she had not been so attentive as a hostess should be to a guest; this made Lucy flush as she felt that there was some truth in the reproof. She promised to mend her ways.

"That's right," said Reece, adding lamely: "You see, when we stroll out and Charlie's father and I somehow leave you behind, as we have done several times, and then we come back—h'm, some time afterwards—to find you, why, you two are apart as if you were strangers! He is smoking on the grass and you are botanising!"

It was a muddled kind of speech but Lucy understood the drift of it. She did not, however, respond to the obvious suggestion.

Lucy Reece began to mend her ways that afternoon; she decided to make an advance, a step which cost her some rebellious feelings.

"Mr. Crewe," she said to Charlie, whom she found in the library, smoking the inevitable cigar, "I am going to town, and it looks uncharitable to leave you alone, as our worthy parents are out. Will you walk with me? It is only three miles there and three miles back?"

She was just slightly confused; his clear eyes had lifted for a second, flashing a keen glance at her, only to close lazily.

"Is it the same distance each way?" he asked quizzically, seizing upon the awkward turn she had given to her speech. "I really do not think that I am equal to so much exertion, Miss Reece! Why not ride? It's perfectly useless to walk when you can ride, you know!"

"Then you will excuse me for leaving you?" she inquired in a tone that meant that he would be obliged to do so. "I am sorry to have disturbed you." Then, her temper getting the better of her at this rebuff, she burst forth before she was aware of it: "I don't believe you would walk or bestir yourself if you knew that someone was being killed outside on the lawn!"

She was gone. He laughed softly.

"That settles the marriage question! I must take an early opportunity of popping the question and get the thing finished. It *was* rather rude of me though! Yet, by Jove, she gave me a Roland for my Oliver!"

Lucy hurriedly dressed and went on her errand; she was furiously angry now, partly because of Charlie's refusal and partly on account of her own stinging retort. Oh, why do parents act so foolishly as to try to make matches between ill-assorted couples! Lucy could not understand why; she felt angry with her father, with old Mr. Crewe, with everybody, that she should have been placed in so awkward a position!

"It will not be for long now," she comforted herself by saying; "he will give up the idea and will find some excuse for going away!"

So she treated him with proper courtesy for the next two days, although he was almost exasperatingly cool and dense on occasions. She was congratulating herself that there would be no proposal, and therefore she would not have to bear the blame of having refused him, when the thunderbolt came.

They were alone in the small drawing-room used on ordinary occasions. Charlie Crewe laid down his book and went to her side. His face betrayed some set purpose, and, in her surprise and agitation—annoyance, she would have called it!—she rose from the couch at his approach.

The rope swayed with the strain and stretched ominously.

"Miss Reece," he began hesitatingly. He did not call her by her Christian name. "I must apologise for bothering you, because I can pretty well guess beforehand what you will say. I won't waste any words or sentiment over it! Do you think you could marry me? Would you be my wife?"

Everyone will agree that no girl in her senses could have accepted such an offer. Small wonder, therefore, that Lucy drew herself up stiffly and gave him a frigid answer.

"I suppose it is very kind of you, Mr. Crewe, to make the proposal, but I wish you had not."

"Just as I expected," he said, with unconcealed relief. "It was a sort of duty, you see. I was bound to do it, although I knew that the proposal would be unacceptable. I don't think we are suited, do you?"

"I do not think that there is any need to discuss the question of compatibility, Mr. Crewe," she returned icily, and she left him.

Charlie went back to his seat. He tried to smile, but that expression quickly gave place to a frown, and he began to gnaw savagely at his fair moustache. Somehow, he was not satisfied, although he had achieved his object.

"It was beastly hard on her," he muttered, jumping up and pacing the room with quick strides. "I don't want to be forced into marriage with any girl, but I ought to have adopted the more manly course of declining to carry out dad's wish. It wasn't manly to throw the responsibility on her, and to make the proposal in that way. Suitable? Well, perhaps not, but I needn't have insinuated that I didn't think she was good enough for me. Of course, that's how she will take it."

If Lucy had seen him as he strode townwards ten minutes later, she would have marvelled at the energy of this indolent man; and if she could have gauged the depths of his eyes at that moment, she would have entertained some doubts concerning the correctness of her idea respecting the extent

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of his intelligence. But Lucy had her face buried in the clothes of the bed on which she had thrown herself. Her well-moulded figure was shaking convulsively and a smothered sob betokened a condition of mind and heart that would have startled Charlie Crewe.

That evening Lucy did not appear at dinner, and Mr. Reece, with some anxiety, informed his two friends that she was suffering from a severe headache and appeared to be quite prostrate. Mr. Crewe expressed his great regret with evident sincerity; Charlie mumbled some words of sympathy, which were not quite intelligible. The meal was not a success, and the three retired earlier than usual.

Charlie Crewe could not understand what ailed him; he admitted that he ought to have been pleased, but he was not. Of course he did not wish to marry Lucy, and he was not going to marry her, so—— That was how he reasoned on the following morning, but he could not get any farther than the "so——" Lucy was at the breakfast-table, trying hard to appear cheerful, but it was not a successful attempt at all; the elder men were not happy, either, for they had learnt of the failure of the matrimonial negotiations. There was no ill-feeling between the two parents because Lucy had declined the proposal; they accepted the situation in all friendliness.

Charlie saw Lucy go out for a walk, perhaps on some fossilising expedition, as he would have said previously, and he wondered that he should feel rather cross that she had not asked him to accompany her; she must have known that he was fooling when he declined her invitation on the last occasion, he told himself, and now that there was no further chance of an unwelcome proposal, what reason had she for not asking him to go with her?

He watched her out of sight, gnawing at his moustache. It was vexing that she had not asked him; it was a fine morning, and he didn't want to sit in a stuffy library and smoke. A fellow cannot always be reading novels and smoking!

He decided to go out alone and to take a different direction. "I suppose I might have offered to go with her," he mused, as the thought occurred to him, "but I don't care to thrust myself upon anyone." He went off at a swinging pace, trying to wear away his ill-humour by hard walking or to get it blown away by the refreshing breeze.

About a mile from the house the land was hilly, and at one spot was a chine or ravine known as The Grindle. On one side the descent was comparatively easy, but on the other it was exceedingly dangerous to attempt a descent. It was almost perpendicular, with jutting pieces of rock here and there to afford a precarious hold. The Grindle was a lovely spot and formed the destination of many a walk.

Charlie Crewe unconsciously found himself near the Grindle after nearly an hour's tramp; he was on the steep side, and he decided to approach the edge in order to obtain a view of the sloping side and rest for a while.

"I wonder which way she took?" he asked himself incontinently. He gazed at the beauties of the Grindle for a minute or so, after which he threw himself on the grass and lay at full length.

"Charlie, my boy," he said, apostrophising himself "you've been an idiot! If you didn't want the girl"—there was a meaning pause at this point—"*if* you didn't want her," he went on, unconsciously emphasising the little *if*, "you needn't have gone on like that. I should think——"

He stopped and sat bolt upright as a sound struck his ear. He listened. There! It sounded like a cry for help!

He sprang to his feet and hurried along the summit of the Grindle, calling out, in stentorian tones: "Who's there?" And presently he caught the reply: "Here, down the Grindle!"

The voice came from one of the most dangerous portions of the chine, and he recognised it. Good Heavens! How had she got there?

He soon located the exact spot. Lying flat on his face, he looked over; he saw Lucy on a narrow ledge, several feet down. She was compelled to hold a small projection by one hand in order to keep on the ledge, which was almost too narrow to afford a foothold, and, moreover, sloped slightly downwards. It was evident that she had slipped from a higher projection, and had just managed to save herself. Even now, if her feet should slide along the sloping ledge, she would certainly be precipitated to the bottom, a distance of at least one hundred feet!

"Hold on, for Heaven's sake!" cried Charlie. "I'll get you out of that!"

His blood ran cold for a second as he thought of what might happen, but in a moment he was cool and collected. All the latent strength of his character came to the front.

There was no help near, and if he spent time in running in search of a rope, Lucy's strength might give way and—— He shuddered.

He was wearing a light overcoat. He slipped it off and cut and tore the material into stout strips, which he quickly tied together. The nearest projection to which he could attach one end was two or three feet below the edge. He cautiously clambered down and secured the improvised rope. The free end dangled a foot above Lucy's disengaged hand.

"It isn't long enough," groaned Charlie. "Can you hold on while I tear my jacket and make it longer?"

"I can't. My feet are slipping. I'll give a spring and grasp it."

He had great difficulty in suppressing a cry of fear as he saw her spring lightly upwards. Her hands grasped the line. It swayed with the strain and stretched ominously.

"For Heaven's sake," cried Charlie again, "be careful. Wait till I get down a little further to help you. Oh, what should I do if you fell? I cannot bear to think of it!"

She was climbing up, steadily, hand over hand, as she had been taught to do in the gymnasium; but at that involuntary remark she stopped and looked at him with a gaze that penetrated the inmost recesses of his heart and caused a peculiar feeling of exaltation to spring up within it.

"Would you care so very much?" The words came from her lips before she could realise their meaning; she flushed fiery red immediately she had uttered them, and, turning her eyes from him, she continued the ascent.

"I should have nothing else to live for, Lucy!" he declared, not impulsively, but with the cool deliberation that proceeds from full recognition of the truth.

She reached the projection to which the line was secured; while she held to that projection, he drew the free end of the line towards him and scrambled to the summit, where he held it taut as he lay on the ground. This gave her the means of getting to the summit.

Scarcely had she placed herself beyond danger when he had her in his arms; and she, nestling closely to him, gave vent to her over-strained feelings in a flood of tears.

She had been trying to get a specimen of the bee orchis when she had slipped, narrowly escaping a dreadful death.

"I am so sorry that I made that cruel remark about your not being energetic enough or brave enough to——" She began, but he stopped her with a kiss.

"I think we have both been making a big blunder, haven't we, now? And I propose that we go straight back to our worthy parents and tell them that we have decided, all of our own free will, to bring about the realisation of their hopes. Do you agree, Lucy?"

Charlie always averred that Lucy said "Yes!" but Lucy declared that she made no reply, for the simple reason that Charlie did not give her time. A man in love is so impulsive!

Geo. Day.

He: "But you promised me this waltz?" She: "Yes, but that was before I had seen you dance!"

"He offered her his hand and fortune." "Did she accept it?" "No; the first was too large and the second too small!"

"She is a Russian Countess." "Indeed! Has she much in her own name?" "Has she? She's got nearly the entire alphabet!"

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Making the Best of It.

MABEL: "I'm sorry you asked me to marry you; it pains me to refuse." George (cheerfully): "Oh, don't worry; perhaps you know best what I am escaping."

Brave Girl!

ADA: "I saved a man's life at Blackpool last summer." Clara: "How? I didn't see anything about it in the papers." Ada: "Well, I should hope not. He said he'd die if I didn't let him kiss me."

He Had His Doubts.

JUDY: "Will ye give me yer promise, Dennis, that y'll love me foriver?" Dennis: "Sure, an' Oi'd loike to do that same, Judy, but Oi'm hardly of the opinion that Oi'll lasht as long as that."

Then They Recommenced.

JACK: "The photograph you sent me is just like you, dear. I kissed it ever so many times." Nina: "Did it return your kisses?" Jack: "No, of course not." Nina: "Then how can you say it is like me?"

Two Different Things.

DAISY: "I have an engagement with Cholly, and I don't know how to get out of it." Helen: "Haven't you any reason for breaking it?" Daisy: "Yes, I have a reason—Cholly is the reason—but I want an excuse."

Forewarned is Forearmed.

ETHEL (engaged a week): "George and I have never had a quarrel!" Maud: "Oh, I think you ought to have one before you are married; otherwise you can't be quite sure whether you are going to have your own way or not!"

Then There Were Screams of Silence.

"AH!" sighed Miss Antique, with a languishing glance in the direction of Mr. Oldboy, "if I had been born in the days of chivalry!" "Well," he said, as he scratched the bald spot on the top of his head: "You came pretty near it."

He Would Have Cause to Remember.

SYMPATHETIC SISTER: "Cheer up, Arthur, Mabel has treated you badly in jilting you, but you will soon forget her." Arthur (moodily): "Not for a long time, sis, I fear. The lovely jewellery I gave her was purchased on the easy payment system."

Hubby Had Got Tired of Cold Meat.

MASTER (to cook): "You needn't say anything to your mistress, Jane, but have you a policeman for a sweetheart?" Cook (indignantly): "Certainly not, sir!" Master: "Then you'll have to get one, or else leave. I want someone to eat up the cold mutton."

A Little Going a Long Way.

MR. HENPECK: "I shall have to go to town to-day, Maria, and I shall want some money, for there's train fare, lunch, 'bus fares, and I've got to——" Mrs. Henpeck: "Well, John, take this shilling, and, mind, if you come home the worse for drink I'll not let you in."

An Unkind Suggestion.

SHE: "So you are writing me a poem?" The Poet: "Yes, but I can't find anything to rhyme with 'Cupid' that will adequately express my state of mind." She: "Why not 'stupid'?"

A Cool Proposition.

"MY daughter is absolutely too young to marry," snorted old Goldrick. "Well," replied the dejected suitor, "what would you say to my taking her marriage dowry now and waiting a few years for the girl?"

Cruel Girl!

"I MET a pretty girl this morning, and she looked at me in a way which led me to believe she was trying to make an impression." "Shouldn't wonder. People generally select something soft for that purpose."

He'd Had Them Before.

MRS. YOUNGWIFE (welcoming husband home): "Now, ducky, I've been cooking all day. I've made pie and cake and biscuits." Ducky (cheerfully): "Then let us eat, drink, and be merry, for to-morrow we die."

Less Sudden Than She Thought.

HE: "Oh, pray, Miss Dalrymple, don't call me Mr. Brookes." She: "Oh, but our acquaintance has been so brief. (Sweetly) Why shouldn't I call you Mr. Brookes?" He: "Oh, only because my name's John Somerset!"

Poor Old Hubby!

"WHAT time is it?" asked his wife suspiciously, as he came in. "About one." Just then the clock struck three. "Gracious! When did the clock commence to stutter?" he said, with a feeble attempt at justification and a joke.

Would His Love Melt or Dissolve?

SHE: "If it were necessary, and I were your wife, would you go through fire and water for me?" He: "Do you think it would be necessary?" She: "It might be." He: "Then I think you had better marry a fireman. Good evening!"

Sufficient Credentials.

CAREFUL PARENT: "Before I give consent to your proposed marriage to my daughter I must know something about your character." Suitor: "Certainly. Here is my bank-book." Careful Parent (after a glance): "Take her, my son, and be happy."

The Joys of Matrimony.

HUSBAND: "Don't you think that you are rather unreasonable to expect me to take you to a ball, and stay awake until four o'clock, and then get up at eight and go to my work?" Wife: "I may be a little unreasonable, but it's perfectly brutal of you to mention it."

His Debts Had Grown.

RICH AMERICAN FATHER-IN-LAW: "My daughter and I are much disappointed in your estate. It seems to be a barren tract of land, and I don't believe anything has been grown on it for fifty years." The Penniless Count (cheerfully): "Monsieur forgets ze magnificent mortgages."

The Sarcasm Was Intense.

"MY hands are awfully cold," said the pretty girl suggestively, as they drove home from the dance. "Why didn't you bring your muff with you?" asked the practical young man. "I did!" she snapped. But she wouldn't explain where the muff had gone to, and he has been wondering ever since just what she meant.

But Ethel Said Nothing.

"ETHEL," said a fond mother, "did George leave any package for me last evening?" Ethel (falteringly): "Why, no, mamma! What made you ask?" "Oh, nothing; only I heard him say, as he said good-bye, 'Now, here is one more for your mother,' and I thought that it might be that pattern for lace-edging that his mother promised to send me."

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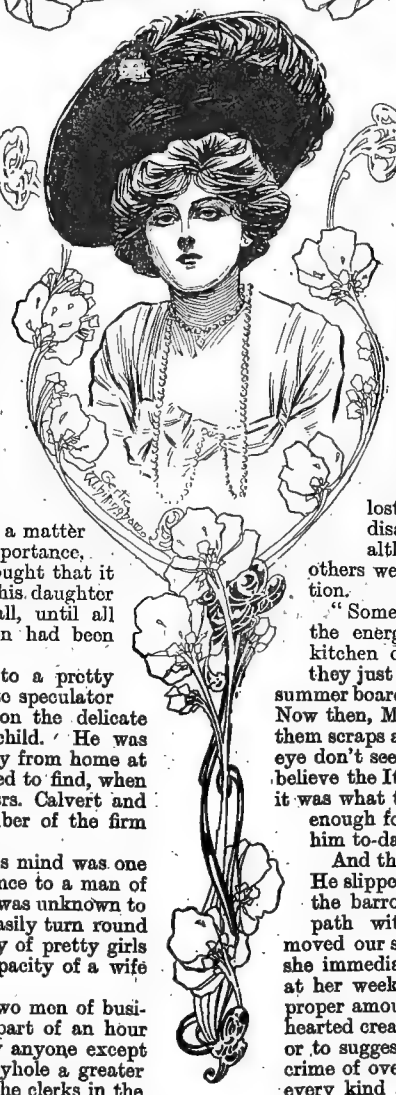
ONLY AN AMATEUR.



The Romance of a Gentleman Organ-Grinder.

THERE were three alternatives offered to Mr. Nicholas Frost. The first was suicide, and he put that on one side immediately as being too painful to contemplate; the second was borrowing from his friends to enable him to pay the debt which he owed of £10,000, which looked so much like the broad and easy way leading to the workhouse that he fought shy of venturing along it, and the third was marrying his daughter to the firm of Calvert and Son, his creditors.

Whether the father or son had her was a matter which after all was of very secondary importance, and this was especially so because he thought that it would perhaps be wisest neither to take his daughter into his confidence nor to consult her at all, until all the preliminary details of the transaction had been successfully negotiated.

"There is some advantage attaching to a pretty daughter after all," mused this unfortunate speculator one morning, as he set out to the City on the delicate mission of endeavouring to sell his only child. He was glad that the young lady was staying away from home at the time, and on the whole he was relieved to find, when he reached the magnificent offices of Messrs. Calvert and Son, Stock Brokers, that the junior member of the firm was also away on his holidays.

After all, the subject which occupied his mind was one which he could broach with more confidence to a man of a certain age, than to a young fellow who was unknown to him even by sight, and who might very easily turn round and say that there were in the world plenty of pretty girls who would suit him admirably in the capacity of a wife without a forfeit of £10,000.

Exactly what transpired between these two men of business, closeted as they were for the best part of an hour together, will probably never be known by anyone except the office boy, who had his ear to the keyhole a greater part of the time. But it was noticed by the clerks in the counting-house that when Mr. Nicholas Frost came downstairs he looked very hot and uncomfortable.

The subject which he had in hand was one of such extreme delicacy, that he spent half an hour in beating round the bush in the most elaborate manner, before he dared come to the point; and it was only when he at last blurted out that in the place of the £10,000, which was due, his daughter would be at the disposal of Mr. Calvert, senior, that he discovered the very unpleasant fact that Mrs. Calvert was still alive.

Thereupon he beat a very sudden and shame-faced retreat, and as he wended his way home he confessed that the choice now practically lay between suicide and the workhouse. After the most unfortunate mistake which had occurred, he could not very well mention the subject which he had in mind to the junior partner.

His prospects were anything but cheerful, and it was even a question whether it was practicable to borrow £10,000 from his friends. If not—then he must go to bed and think it over.

The organ grinder at the gate had been grinding away for fully twenty minutes at the popular tunes which filled his barrel. The nurses and the children under their charge had gaped over the fence to their hearts' content, and the pitiful old ladies confined to their rooms on the upper floors of that fashionable country boarding house had rained down sundry pennies upon him, a good many of which were lost in the long grass, to judge from the disappointed look on the man's face, although he found them quickly when the others were showered down by way of compensation.

"Some won't encourage them," said Mrs. Grit, the energetic proprietress, as she stood at the kitchen door, duster in hand; "but I say that they just help boarders to keep lively; and if your summer boarder gets low spirited you're apt to lose her. Now then, Maria, don't stand gaping there, but take them scraps and warm them in the oven. What the eye don't see the heart don't grieve for, and I don't believe the Italian foreigner would care if he did know it was what the folks left on their plates. If it's good enough for mince to-morrow it's good enough for him to-day, ain't it?"

And then Maria called the foreigner to come in. He slipped the monkey's chain from the handle of the barrow, and shuffled up the well-kept gravel path with a look of eager expectation which moved our susceptible old lady upstairs to tears, and she immediately made up her mind not to complain at her weekly bill, although it was about double the proper amount, as Mrs. Grit was such a good, kind-hearted creature it would be cruel to hurt her feelings or to suggest that she had been guilty of the heinous crime of overcharging one of her boarders. And so every kind action has its reward, although we may not know it.

While the organ grinder was feeding in the kitchen with a relish which did great credit to the scraps, although it made them look rather small, a young man came down the road with a fishing-rod in one hand and an empty basket in the other. He was very good-looking, and his peculiar oval face with its bright Southern complexion and jet black hair was shown off to the very best advantage by the exceedingly Bohemian dress which he wore, probably for the very reason that he knew how becoming it was.

Your City man when he goes for a holiday as a rule prefers to be a little eccentric in his attire, and certainly the combination of coloured shirts, knickerbockers, and a huge fisherman's hat gave the young man the appearance of a theatrical bandit rather than anything else. He put down the empty fish basket inside the boarding-house gate, and then went back and examined the barrel organ.

"It looks easy," he thought to himself. "I never could see why girls should waste the best years of their lives learning

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the piano, which probably they will never play without giving offence to anybody with an ear for music, when the whole thing can be done so much better by just turning a handle. If I had to earn my own living I think that this sort of thing would suit me."

Then he took hold of the handle and began turning it. The result was very bad.

"Not so easy as it looks," he thought to himself, as he pounded the handle round with a series of disconnected jerks and began to get hot.

"Wonder what tune I'm supposed to be playing now. Never heard one quite like it before. Doesn't seem to attract any very great crowd either."

It was disappointing that there was nobody, not even a baby, to appreciate his efforts. The nursemaids, on whose support he counted, had all gone into the house to look after the children, and the older people, imagining that the legitimate grinder had recommenced operations in a very unfavourable mood, thought that the sooner he went away the better; and in the hopes of discouraging him to discontinue, they carefully abstained from looking out.

"Wonder where the owner of this muscle-developing machine has taken himself to?" mused the young man as he mopped his forehead with a handkerchief. Then an inspiration came to him.

"By Jove!" he said, laughing softly to himself at the brilliancy of his own thoughts, "I'll trundle the thing down to the village and see how much I can make. It's down the hill all the way there, and the old man can fetch it back himself if he wants it. Good idea."

He found the barrel organ a considerable weight at first, but after a time it seemed to run easier, and finally the only question was whether he would ever be able to stop the thing at the other end. However, half way down the hill, when the speed was estimated at fifteen miles an hour, he brought up against the wheel of a small dog cart which was coming slowly in the opposite direction.

Thereupon the barrel organ went over, playing the last chords of "After the Ball" as it did so, and finally settled down on the top of the young man who had got entangled in the handles.

When he got up again he found that the horse was rearing and doing its best to run backwards down the hill on its hind legs, while the young lady, who was driving alone, was screaming at the top of her voice.

Whether the horse had a natural antipathy to popular tunes, or hated Italians, or thought that the barrel organ was going to attack it again, did not appear, but it was some time before the young man who sprang at the frightened creature's head was able to persuade it to assume its natural position on four legs.

In the meantime the young lady, whose nerves had naturally been very much shaken, had not failed to notice the good looks of the man whom she was kind enough to consider her saviour, although, as a matter of fact, he had done more towards bringing her to a sudden end than anything else.

"Saved," she muttered to herself, as the horse at last resumed its horizontal position, "and by an organ grinder as handsome as he is graceful."

Miss Frost, for she was the daughter of the man who at that moment was trying to sell her hand to his creditors, had been to a modern school and she knew Italian, and as soon as she had caught her breath she aired it for the organ grinder's benefit.

In Gay Paris

"Signor," she said, bending forward and showing her pretty white teeth, "how can I thank you for saving my life? It was very brave of you."

"An Italian lady, by Jove," thought the young man—an Italian would never have supposed it for a minute—and he instantly replied in the same language and an accent peculiar to street arabs.

"Signorina, that I have done something to spare you alarm has made me happy. If by chance I saved your life I am too much honoured and favoured." He thought, on the whole, it was better to put it this way to apologise for having done his best to kill her.

"Never was there such an organ-grinder," thought pretty Miss Frost. Then her blue eyes lighted on the barrel-organ, where it lay apparently none the worse for the collision.

"Is it hurt—your organ?" she asked anxiously in the Italian language as spoken in the class-rooms at Girton. And the young man interrupted her in the same language as taught by Professor Sprachemalli."

"That is my affair, signorina."

"How proud he is—perhaps he is a prince who has been obliged to fly the country," thought Miss Frost, and thereupon she bestowed another gracious smile upon him, and, thanking him with all the most eloquent phrases she could remember, she drove away, turning once to wave a dainty lace handkerchief to her preserver.

And so they parted—Miss Frost to tell her adventure to her aunt, and the young man to find the missing owner of the organ, and to pay him the price of the damage which he had brought about.

At tea-time he had made many inquiries concerning the Italian lady, and to his surprise he found that nobody, not even Mrs. Grit herself, knew anything of her.

This was most disappointing, for he had already been looking forward to their next meeting with pleasurable anticipation, and framing a few words which would express his anxiety after her welfare in the most eloquent words of her poetic language.

Do what he would he could not forget that pretty face and gentle voice, and he found himself singing "Some Day" as he wandered about the garden on a moonlight night in a voice, so plaintive that one old lady sent down her maid to inquire if he was feeling unwell, and if there was anything which she could do for him.

He procured an Italian dictionary and phrase book, and sat late into the night, brushing up his knowledge of the language, which had never been a very extensive one, and every day he wandered up and down between the boarding-houses and the village, looking out for that little red-wheeled cart with the spirited bay horse and the charming young lady inside.

However, it never came his way, and for the very good reason that Miss Frost's aunt had forbidden her ever to drive out alone again, and condemned her to the family carriage and the driving of old Carter Pattenden, the family coachman, who always avoided that hill into the village whenever he could.

So for many days the young man never saw the beautiful foreigner who had broken his romantic heart, while pretty Mildred Frost hardly knew whether she was wretched or happy, when she thought of the wonderful romance that had come into her life, for she owned to herself that she adored the organ-grinder, who was certainly a prince in reduced circumstances.

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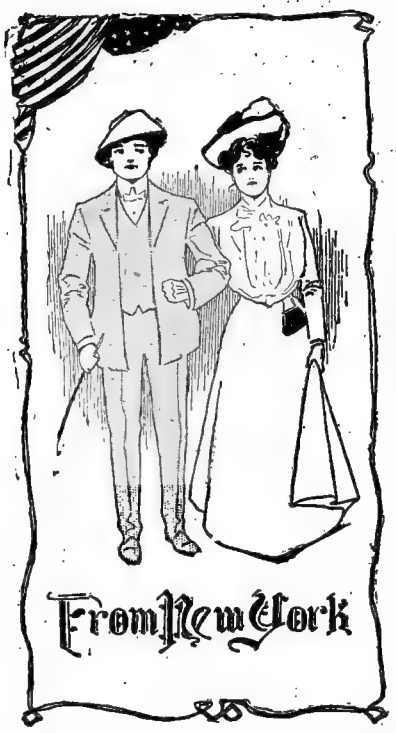

At last they met. It was in this way. The young man was consoling himself by fishing on the banks of a little stream which ran through a wood, and Miss Frost was out for a solitary walk, lost in contemplation of the happiness which was in store for her some day, when the second volume of her novel in real life would be good enough to begin.

"My gallant preserver," she cried, as she caught sight of his picturesque broad-brimmed hat. "Oh, signor, is it possible?"

And he answered in Italian also.

"Signorina, this is the happiest hour of my life. Ah, how I have dreamt of this meeting, how I longed with all the passion of my heart to speak to you once more, to stand face to face, and to gaze into those dazzling eyes," he had learnt this by heart out of an Italian novel, and he was rather proud of it.

And so these two began to make love to one another in a foreign language, and never for a moment did either of them suspect the nationality of the other. Miss Frost felt sure that her aunt would not welcome an organ-grinder as a guest, and so she had to make excuses for not asking him to call.

The young man, on his part, fished for an invitation as he had never fished for trout. He was a gentleman, and he thought that after the open way in which they had expressed their admiration for one another the least the young lady could do was to ask him to five o'clock tea.

He was desperately in earnest over this adventure, and he was burning to know her parents and to pay his addresses properly. However, Miss Frost did not feel equal to introducing a wandering musician into her aunt's drawing-room, and although she was in her heart secretly hoping that he would suggest an elopement, she did not dare even to think of her father's passion when he heard of her attachment for this handsome organ-grinder.

"I wish to goodness that she knew a little English," thought the young man as his adored sat on one side of the stream with a phrase book hidden under her muff, and he sat on the other with a dictionary concealed in his fish basket. "I don't understand half she says, except when she condescends to talk in the language of the eye. I expect something unpleasant will come of this."

Something did.

One evening about twilight the young man and Miss Frost sat in the little cove, which they had chosen on account of the utter seclusion, upon some damp but very mossy rocks.

His arm was about her waist, her head on his shoulder, and he had called her "Carissima" and "Bella Carissima" several times when an avalanche rolled down the steep bank upon them. That was the effect. It was, however, only the portly form of Mr. Nicholas Frost who had come down from town for the day and hearing that his daughter had gone out for a solitary walk, had set out in search for her. and attracted by the sound of voices, he had pitched upon the lovers, and, slipping in the excitement of the moment, he had come down the slope with a rush.

They broke his fall, but when he picked himself up he began to use language which was more forcible and penetrating than polite or coherent. And in the pauses he wanted to know "what the dickens his daughter was doing, and who on earth the confounded rascal was who sat with her."

The young man, quite conscious that he deserved the reproof, only it was the girl's fault for not having asked him to call, was just feeling in his pockets for a card, and wondering somewhat at the fluency with which the old gentleman, who was evidently her guardian or her father, spoke English, when, to his utter amazement, the girl flung herself on her knees.

"Father, please don't be angry," she pleaded in perfect English. "This is the noble organ-grinder who saved my life. He cannot speak one word of English, and in saving me broke his organ, and has to support himself by fishing. Remember, father, that but for him I should now be in my grave. Oh, father, I love him, and so, as you love me, be merciful."

"Mildred Frost," said the old man, "you're an idiot. Here, you organ-grinder, can you speaky Englesy at all, you know?"

"Perfectly," said the young man, with a gesture of despair. "In fact, I'm an Engli-hman. I thought your daughter was an Italian lady until this moment, and she apparently paid the same compliment to my knowledge of the language Allow me to explain the somewhat embarrassing position into which you have put us by your unexpected arrival. I have, I need hardly to say, the most respectful admiration for Miss Frost, and wish to——"

"I can't listen to any explanations," interrupted the old man, stamping his foot on the ground in ungovernable fury. "What business have you to make love to my daughter, you disreputable, dirty, lazy, good-for-nothing vagabond? If you broke your confounded organ in saving her life, although I would like to know how the dickens you did that, I will pay for a new one. I am deeply grateful for what you have done," he added, growing more conciliatory at the look of pain and supplication in his daughter's eyes, "but you see organ-grinding or fishing is not—that is—I——"

"Quite so," said the young man, with slightly heightened colour. "Only there seems to be some mistake. As to organ-grinding, I'm only an amateur. I thought your daughter knew that. I'm no more a professional than I'm an Italian. And perhaps you know James Calvert by name. He has rather an extensive business in the City. I'm his only son. It was a mutual mistake."

The old man sat down on the rock as if he had been stunned. "Done it again," he muttered to himself. "Lost my second chance. There's nothing for it but suicide now. What a fool I am to be sure. I might have seen the fellow was a gentleman."

However, when he had made it clear that he quite understood and appreciated what a good match the young man would be for his daughter, and how proud he would be to call Mr. Calvert, junior, his son-in-law, he found that things were going all right after all. The young man had no idea until he was married to Mildred, daughter of Nicholas Frost, that his father-in-law was no other than the ruined speculator who had lost all his money through his careless dealings with the firm of Calvert and Son, Throgmorton Street.

Stanley Hammond.

To Story Writers.

We shall be pleased to consider complete novelettes of about 20,000 words in length, and to pay cash down for those accepted. Manuscripts must be type-written (or very legibly hand-written), and should be sent to The Editor, *Short Stories*, Henrietta Street, London, W.C. Postage for return of MSS., if unsuitable, should be inclosed.

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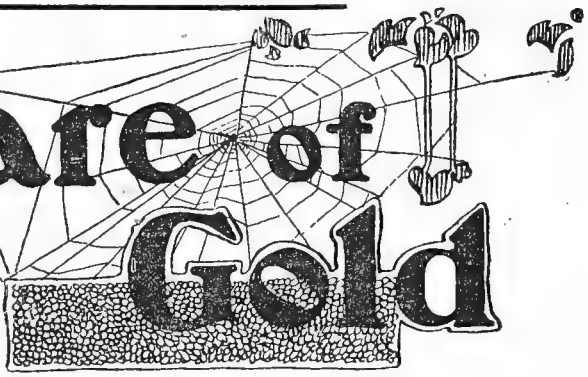
The Snare of Gold



A Tale of Love, Ambition, and Crime.

· · By · ·

HENRY T. JOHNSON.

TWENTY-EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Madeleine Pleads with her Father.

"RONALD GELDART was an outcast from his father's house. Now he is charged with the cruel murder of a poor lady whose only offence was clearly that she knew this Harvey Bligh for what he was; held in her possession the secret of his past, and, no doubt, to that knowledge owed her cruel death," continued Lord Lynton.

"Father! Father!" cried Madeleine, in anguished accents. "You must not speak of him so cruelly and so unjustly!"

"Why not?" exclaimed her father fiercely, fixing a thunderous look upon her.

And she, drawing herself erect, said very quietly and slowly: "Because I love him."

For some moments her father was silent, rage and amazement choking his utterance, then he demanded in a strained and husky voice: "How far has this folly gone? Has anything been said between you?"

"Yes," she answered, "he has asked me to be his wife, and I have promised."

"What! What! I could find it in my heart to say bitter things to you, but, of course, what has transpired has put an end to your folly; you will never see him again."

"On the contrary, I am going to see him now."

"To see him? A man in prison on a charge of murder—one who before long will doubtless be a felon. I forbid you, I dare you—dare you to sully the name you bear by such a course."

"I am sorry," she said, "because till now, strangers in all save ties of blood as we have been, I have always striven to obey you—but now——"

"Now? Well, now this fellow lies in a police-cell, the evidence against him, even without going into it is so overwhelming, that they will not grant him bail. And you——"

"I am his affianced wife. I believe in him and love him. It is in the hour of his direst gloom and peril that my place is most clearly at his side. In my hour of danger he rushed to my aid at peril of his life, in his time of peril I go to him whatever may befall."

"Go then," said the Viscount, pointing to the door, "but—you will not return, my house no longer is your home, you cease to be my child."

For a moment she swayed, convulsed by the conflict within her, not alone of love and duty, but of love and love, of duty and duty. Then she went forth out of the stately mansion, that palace in a colony of palaces, hastening in the direction of the cell wherein her lover lay!

Ronald sprang up with a glad cry. The station gaoler was a stern man, but with a strong heart within his coat of official mail, and he affected an absorbing interest in the perusal of a card of rules throughout their *tête-à-tête*, and there in the grim surroundings of the cell, in Ronald Geldart's darkest hour, the girl he loved repeated once again all that she had confessed of love for him, and trust and faith, in happier scenes, in brighter hours, all that and more.

So that when, a little later, he faced his accusers in the dock, he did so with head erect and a gaze so unflinching, that while some could not find it in their hearts to believe that the hand of Cain could rest upon a brow so frank and open, others, readier to believe evil, added to the list of his alleged offences the crime of callousness, averring that just the man who could bear himself so nonchalantly would do the evil deed.

Eric Geldart, called, repeated the evidence he had given at the inquest as to identification; also he identified the letter, making the appointment with the deceased on the night in question as being in his brother's handwriting.

This, however, Ronald admitted, reiterating also his admission at the inquest that he had kept the appointment on the night in question. And once again he was remanded.

TWENTY-NINTH CHAPTER.

Geldart Determines to Act.

GEORGE GELDART had attained his heart's desire, the end and aim he had aspired to had been reached.

What the big picture to be some day painted, the big book to be some day written, the big battle to be some day fought and won—what these things are to other men, his System was to him, it was his great work, at length he had achieved it, and, like countless men and women before him, he found the yearned-for fruit when gathered turn, like Dead Sea apples, to ashes on his lips.

His pet idea had realised his most sanguine expectations. Hundreds of thousands of pounds in various banks stood to the credit of the quaint, mysterious old man in the names of the various trusts and syndicates under whose denomination he, in conjunction with Sampson Scrimshaw, worked his elaborate scheme, and his one alloy of bitterness had been the reflection that, had his wilder son and partner had faith in him, and had his younger son availed himself of his birth-right partnership instead of flinging it aside, even the gigantic fortune he had piled up with Scrimshaw might have been multiplied, in fact, that with extended operations, their hoard might have surpassed those imaginations and calculations.

And there had been the consoling reflection that even yet it was not too late; he could go back to them now with his system proved, his new Golconda not only prospected but worked, and its output assayed, his Eldorado not only explored but exploited.

Wealth—wealth beyond the dreams of avarice, beyond the realms almost of human imagination could be his and theirs, and he could furnish proof, could give them earnest of the untold-wealth in store.

And then this had happened. Just when he had added the topmost pinnacle to his house of cards—of winning cards—at a breath the whole structure had collapsed in ruin, the son he had wronged and whom he meant to compensate so

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wholly, so munificently, and whose name he meant to clear from that unjust stain, now lay beneath a yet more heinous ban, charged with that supreme offence for which the law prescribes its extremest penalty.

That Ronald had done this thing he could not believe, and, reading the accounts of the tragedy, putting the evidence piece by piece together, he remembered on the night in question meeting, just by chance, Eric and Blagdon near that spot, coming from the direction where the ill-fated girl was found, within a few minutes, perhaps seconds, of the crime, and reflected that had he not turned aside to avoid encountering but pursued his path, he must have happened on the murdered girl.

What was Eric doing there on the very scene of the murder of the misguided girl who held the secret of his fraud?

And then, reading the account of Eric's evidence at the inquest, and listening to the stray comments that reached his ears regarding the affair (for the matter was the chief topic of public discussion), comments directly, desperately condemnatory of Ronald and sympathetic with his brother, the old man knew that Ronald had spoken only the truth and that it was his Judas brother who had lied.

What should he do? What could he do?

Suppose he stood forth before the world and proclaimed aloud his strange, weird story, who would believe him? Ronald perhaps, whose accusers would declare that belief, even if expressed, to be a lie. Eric? Eric might believe, but he would lie his hardest in denial, steep his soul in blacker perjury than ever to hide the lies and fraud of earlier days. And Blagdon? the arch hypocrite and humbug, would indorse his perjury.

True, George Geldart was conscious of the wealth at his command, but how was that to aid him?

Stanyer could tell his version of the story, but then to Stanyer he had represented himself as a very different individual in most ways from the well-known and highly-respected George Geldart believed to have died in Bryanston Square, and to be now resting beneath the marble sarcophagus of the family vault inscribed with his many alleged virtues.

Besides, even if he proved his story, which in the end he possibly might do, how was that to aid him? How was that to hinder Eric from his sinful hounding of his innocent brother to the scaffold?

What should he do? What could he do?

Whatever there was to be done, however many steps he had were to be taken, this was the first: to seek out Eric, to face him, and by all or any means prevail upon, force him if need be, to lift the load of calumny and perjury that he had heaped upon his brother's head.

THIRTIETH CHAPTER.

Blagdon Gets a Shock.

Three men were seated in the smoking-room of Sampson Scrimshaw's luxuriously appointed flat. One talking, the others listening with indrawn breath.

And when George Geldart finished his story Scrimshaw wiped beads of perspiration from his brow, and Stanyer, clutching the arm of his chair, instinctively moved that chair a little farther from the speaker.

A shudder and a silence fell upon the two men, to whom it seemed that they were in the presence of one back from the grave, listening to the voice of one risen from the dead. And at last Stanyer, in a strained, husky voice, said slowly:

"Then, that man at Sydney was telling the truth?"

"Absolutely," said Geldart. "I knew Dick Farningham's cousin who went out to Australia very well."

His elbow resting on the table, he leant his head upon his hand with an absent, saddened air. His scheme had turned out so wrong, and ended so badly; the System had been proved; he had in what seemed to him the short sequel to his life's story amassed a fortune, yet what did it avail him?

He had also proved his younger son innocent of the theft of which he had suspected him, but then, at what a cost!

He had proved his elder son a very villain, how deeply dyed a villain he dared not even think; and Clare—whom he had regarded almost as a daughter—Clare was dead—murdered, and his younger son stood charged with the awful crime.

He was sure that younger son was innocent, also, of this charge, but who was guilty? That was the question he scarcely dared to frame.

"Well," said Scrimshaw, after a pause, "this accounts for a lot that puzzled me. I knew that only a man of long experience and colossal ability could be so perfect a master of financial craft as you. I knew you had a story of some kind, that you had been a man of mark.

"What I imagined was that in some way yours was a second life, though not in the way it has turned out to be; that in your earlier phase you had made some big mistake, something had happened that you could not face, and when I noted your aversion to meeting many people, and particularly people moving in certain swims and circles, and, again, when once or twice very early or very late callers at the office passing you casually upon the stair asked who was that strange old man, and tried to cudgel their brains to locate the face, I was all the more convinced.

"I remember watching from my window between the lights one night I saw a man in passing turn and look at you, then grow white and stagger, one hand on his brow, and the other on his heart; and when Jack Widdicombe came to the City to consult me about the *Meteor*, as he entered my room with a face white as death, he gasped out that he had seen a ghost."

"It seems to me," said Stanyer, "you'll very likely find some difficulty in establishing the fact that you are yourself, especially if you have two such men as Blagdon and that bright elder son of yours to deal with. Why didn't you make a clean breast of it all when you met me?"

"We hadn't met for so long, we'd become little more than strangers, and, to tell the truth, I was a little bit amused by the way you patronised me; it was a novel sensation. And then, again, I saw my way to fulfilling the dream of so many years and testing my System. But now I'm more bewildered than I was in those weird hours when the terror of the fate I had only just escaped was still upon me. What can I do—what can I do?"

"Clearly the first thing to be done," said Scrimshaw, self-possessed and matter-of-fact as ever, "is to extract the truth out of your son Eric and his precious partner. It won't be the easiest task. Getting butter out of a dog's mouth will be child's play to it. Eric will battle like a tiger; he's a villain, but he's a villain of grit—the easier man to tackle will be Blagdon; he's not such a villain as the other, but he's flabbier. Now it seems to me our best course is to get him here."

"Would he come?" asked Stanyer.

"He'll have to," said Scrimshaw. "I'll make him!"

"How?"

"I've got him in the toils; when you've got a man set fast in the toils of debts that he can't meet you can make him dance to a good many tunes, according as you pull the string. One moment!"

He walked across to the telphone and asked for Blagdon's number; then they heard him in conversation with the man they wanted.

"I want you to come over here to my rooms in Walsingham House. You can't? I'm afraid you must. Can't; you distribute prizes to—what? Oh, well, the Young People's Self Help and Mutual Improvement Society must get somebody else. You don't understand my tone? Come over here and then you will. Look here, if you're not at my rooms by nine o'clock to-night I close your account and tell my lawyers to put on all pressure. Don't do that? Well, you come here. What's it all about? Tell you when you come. Is it to your benefit? It's necessary to your safety. You'll come? Of course you will!"

He rang off, and turned to his visitors.

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"That cur will come to heel." Then he rang up Eric.

"Want to see you here at half-past nine. At the House? No, here—I'm not coming down. You must? I tell you you mustn't. What do I mean? Come here and I'll tell you. You mean to vote against the Amendment? You must pair. What the dickens am I driving at? Come here, and you'll see. You'll demand an explanation? You'll get it. Yes, I've been dining, quite wisely. Be here at ten to-night or to-morrow's papers will publish something more than interesting and less than pleasant, so far as you are concerned. You will? Oh, yes, I'll explain my words, and more. Good-bye!" Then to his guests:

"He's coming too."

* * * * *

The hour brought the man. Precisely as the subdued chime of the bronze pedestal clock in Scrimshaw's smoke-room sounded nine the soft-footed, subdued-mannered man-servant announced "Mr. Blagdon,' and Boanerges, very flustered and perspiring, and breathing deeply and rapidly, hurried in. Having glanced round the room to see they were alone, he exclaimed:

"Bless my soul, Scrimshaw, what's the meaning of this? I was perfectly astounded by your peremptory tone and words; perhaps, however, it sounded differently through the telephone."

"Yes, the tone does lose in transmission. Sit down."

"But surely, Scrimshaw, you're not going to be unpleasant with regard to my account? You've always been so agreeable, when the balance has been heavier against me than now, and at the present moment it would be most inconvenient; in fact, impossible for me to—arrange a settlement."

"It depends on you whether I am going to be pleasant or otherwise."

"Bless me! what do you mean? What have I done?"

"It doesn't matter what you have done, it's what you're going to do that matters."

He touched a bell. Frederick Stanyer entered, and Scrimshaw, motioning him to a seat, went on: "This gentleman is Mr. Stanyer, back from Australia; you don't know him, but that's of no importance."

Blagdon puffed out his cheeks.

"I want him to listen to what I am going to read, and you are going to sign, and he and I are going to witness."

"But you've got it all in the accounts. I've never disputed your figures."

"It has no more to do with our account than with the man in the moon. Listen!"

And Blagdon, with his eyes almost starting from his puffy cheeks, listened while Scrimshaw read. And this is what he heard:

"I, Boanerges Blagdon, of The Laurestinas, Brixwell, in the County of Surrey, and of Billiter Square, in the City of London, merchant and broker, being of perfectly sound mind, conscious of and responsible for my actions, hereby make this solemn declaration.

"In the month of January of the present year I did in conjunction with Eric Geldart——"

Boanerges clutched the arms of his chair.

"Conspire unlawfully to commit the following offences."

"Why, what does this mean?" said Blagdon, starting up, with a catch of the breath and even paler yet.

"Sit down, and I'll tell you." And Scrimshaw went on reading:

"Firstly, having embezzled from the partnership assets of the then firm of Geldart, Blagdon and Geldart, of Billiter Square aforesaid, merchants and brokers, the sum of £10,000 in notes!"

Blagdon gasped.

"Is that man a detective? I won't sit here!"

"You'd better." And Scrimshaw repeated: "The sum of £10,000—to procure and incite one Clare Armitage, spinster, now deceased——"

The man's face turned from white to grey.

"To abstract the keys of a certain desk on the premises of George Geldart in Bryanston Square. Secondly, in conjunction with the said Eric Geldart, to change the said notes and with the proceeds thereof to replace the amount of the said embezzled assets. Thirdly, to steal and destroy a certain promissory note for £1,500 given by me to the said George Geldart, Esq., of Bryanston Square aforesaid, to secure the sum of £1,500 advanced by him to me. Fourthly, with the said Eric Geldart and one Hamish Macquoich, L.R.C.P., to manufacture false and fraudulent evidence respecting the mental condition of the said George Geldart with the object of and for the purpose of placing the said George Geldart under detention in an asylum for the insane."

Scrimshaw paused. Blagdon, with a dogged, hunted look in his eyes, cried:

"Is that all?"

"Not quite all, there's something I am going to mention later. But so far you'll sign."

"I won't," said Blagdon hoarsely. "I deny it all—all!"

"Just as you denied giving the promissory note!"

He passed his hand across his brow. What did it all mean? Had Eric split? But, no! even if he would have done so it would be as fatal to himself as to Boanerges. And if Eric had not split what other evidence could there be? Geldart was dead. Clare? With a shudder he reflected that Clare was dead. What then was all this indictment? What was their attempt to wring this confession from him based upon? Theory, imagination, bluff; then he would meet it with bluff.

"It's all a lie, an infamous lie!" he exclaimed, "and I will nail it to the counter and I will assert myself and vindicate my character, my unblemished character, against those who dare to assail a man in my postition. Yes, by George, sir, I'll do so to their cost!" Then, after a moment's pause, convinced that he was on the right track, he turned on Stanyer.

"Are you a police officer? If so, where are your credentials? I demand to see them. If you are not, how dare you intrude your presence on me. And you, Scrimshaw, how dare you bring me here to listen to a charge so false, so infamous!"

"I'll explain that later," said Scrimshaw, striking a vesta and applying it to his cigar. Then, his foot upon the arm of his chair, after a few thoughtful puffs, he said:

"There's one other clause I'm going to add, but I'm going to get you to draft it."

"Some other preposterous lie. And what may that relate to?"

"The murder of Clare Armitage, and your presence on the scene at the time!"

All the bluff, all the bravado of Blagdon was instantly crushed and pulverised; his knees fell over with a sudden jerk; his manner, his bearing, the whole man, suddenly collapsed as he listened to the thundered words—met the thunderous

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gaze of his accuser, a gaze he had never seen in that man's eyes before.

"Now," said Scrimshaw, "there is pen and ink, add the other clause and—sign!"

"I won't—I won't!" he said in a hoarse, choking voice. For a moment he seemed unable to breathe. "I'll leave this place; let me out—let me out!"

"When you have signed!"

"But I won't; I'll leave this place!" He made for the door, Scrimshaw put his back to it, and the key clicked in the lock. He gazed at the windows.

"I'll shout for police!" Then his eye caught another door. Panting and breathless he made a dash towards it, turned the handle, flung it open wide. "You'll pay for this!" he said, facing the two, for they were standing calm and immovable, making no sign to stay him. "As for your other clause," he went on, "it's only another lie, we—weren't—I mean I wasn't there!"

"You were! You were!"

"Who saw me there? Bah!" for his question unanswered by them, he turned, dashed into the adjoining room, a dimly-lit chamber round which he searched, casting a hasty glance for yet another door.

And his eyes fell upon a mirror, a mirror reflecting the tiny gleam of one solitary gas jet. And his own white face.

And another face. Oh, God!—the face of George Geldart! whom he had seen in his grave clothes lying in his coffin! There—there it was beside him! With a shriek he turned from the reflected image, and lo! there face to face, close to him, almost touching him stood the image that had been reflected.

A moment, with hair rising erect, with a great spasm at his heart, he looked upon the face and form of the George Geldart whom he had betrayed, whose son he was content to let unjustly hang—then down in a heap he crashed and tumbled at his feet.

THIRTY-FIRST CHAPTER.

Father and Son.

So complete was his collapse that for a while they thought the shock had caused heart failure. But by-and-bye he recovered consciousness and came round. Only they dared not let George Geldart again approach him.

Piteously, frantically he clung to them as a child might to its parents, beseeching them to keep what he could not conceive to be other than the apparition, the accusing spirit of the man he had wronged, away.

And when they bade him, as the condition of their so doing, sign that confession, he, whimpering abjectly, assented to sign it as it stood. But Scrimshaw was firm.

"Bring Geldart in," he said, "let him tell what he knows!" And then the broken wretch bade them give him the pen and he would sign it, clause and all, only in mercy let them keep the awful Thing away.

Then Scrimshaw put it to him that he was there, and with the certainty of one thing for the basis of a guess at another, that he was standing by when it was done.

"No, no, not close by! Not far off, but I could not see what was going on for the mist and the darkness.

"Put that down, Stanyer! But you knew!"

"Not all, not all. I couldn't tell why she was screaming."

"Write that down too."

"You didn't think that he was killing her?"

"No, no; not till he came back and I saw his hands."

"Write fast, Frederick Stanyer:"

"Her blood upon his hands, on Eric Geldart's hands, and then you knew what he had done!"

"Not quite, not for certain; for when I challenged him he wouldn't answer, he only washed his hands at the fountain, then caught me by the arm and hurried me away."

"My God!" ejaculated Scrimshaw, "this is the worst thing I ever heard. Poor, poor Old Mystery! Have you got it all, Stanyer?"

"And hurried me away," Stanyer repeated. "Yes, there it is."

"Now sign," said Scrimshaw, handing the beaten, pulseless, backboneless wretch the pen.

A moment he strove to make one final stand.

"It'll mean my ruin!" But they, knowing that, whatever the penalty, he had merited it, knowing with what unhesitating callousness he had been content if not to wreck, to suffer another's ruin, to hold his tongue when even a word might save an innocent life, were quite relentless.

"Sign!" said Scrimshaw. "Bring Geldart in; let him tell him all he knows!"

"No, no!" he quavered hastily, and, knowing that they knew much, but not how much they knew, and dreading the approach of the man he had seen nearly a year ago in cerements, the man he for long had thought his treachery had killed, he took the pen and signed.

And no sooner had he done so than the consciousness of what he had done flashed upon him, possessed him even more strongly than his terror.

"Give it me back!" he clamoured. "I deny all—deny you to prove anything!"

But he appealed in vain. Scrimshaw, snatching the paper with one hand, with the other thrust him back into his chair.

"My friend, it is so seldom you perform a really honest action that, having brought you to one, I can't stand by and see you spoil it. And now you'd better have another nip of brandy to bring you quite round. Hullo!" for a bell rung, just as the chime hummed out the half hour and the smooth-faced, smooth-tongued, smooth-mannered servant announced:

"Mr. Eric Geldart."

"Don't let him in; don't let him see me, he'll—he'll murder me!" And Scrimshaw, opening a third door, he bundled swiftly through it, and made his way down a side stair out into the street, out into the world that he scarcely dared to face and that ere long might be ringing with the news of his disgrace.

The member for Little Claverton entered with a stern, inquiring look on his face.

"I don't understand your message, Mr. Scrimshaw, and am here to demand an explanation." Then his eye fell upon Stanyer.

"What does this mean?" he asked. "I was not aware that I was going to meet a gentleman with whom I am unacquainted."

"I think we shall be able to explain everything, Geldart," said Scrimshaw, lazily; "won't you sit down, and, if you'd like a drink, there's the tantalus."

"I will not sit down, and be hanged to your tantalus! I came here to learn your meaning in presuming to address me as you did just now over the telephone."

"And you shall. I sent for you here to save a life."

"What do you mean?"

"Your brother's life."

"My brother's life is nothing to me. He and I have long ceased to be brothers, and he must take the consequences of his crime."

"Precisely, but not of yours."

"What!" for a moment his eyes wavered and his face paled. "What new insolence, I may say madness, is this?"

"Neither madness nor insolence; plain, straightforward fact. I sent for you to clear your brother from the charge of murder now made against him, and from the earlier slander fixed on him of having robbed his father."

"And you and my brother can be hanged if you think that, because I have done business with you, and perhaps you have a few thousands against me on your books, that entitles you to be insolent; let me tell you, you have mistaken your man! After this interview never presume to communicate with me in any way again."

"So be it," said the other, "but before this interview closes let me read something that may interest you."

And he read aloud—"I, Boanerges Blagdon," and Eric started as at an electric shock, and as Scrimshaw read on and on his visitor's face became more set and rigid, his breath came and went slowly, his cheeks, even his lips, paled and his eyes

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quivered with a dangerous light, his hands were clenched till the nails cut into the flesh

Stanyer, watching him narrowly, marked how when Scrimshaw reached the fifth clause Eric's nostrils dilated, his breath came deeper and faster; watched him, too, just as Scrimshaw had reached the last line of that confession, spring like a panther at the man who held it, and seeing this flung himself upon him, took him by the throat, and in another instant Scrimshaw had his wrist in a vice-like grip, for he was strong of hand as well as head.

"None of this, or else—a whistle, and the police are here, and you will leave with handcuffs on your wrists!"

"Scrimshaw, you shall pay for this!" cried Eric.

"I pay what I owe. Now listen to me. There is time for you and Blagdon to clear out to some country where extradition treaties cease from troubling, leaving a confession which clears your brother."

But the expression of impatient scorn on Geldart's face as well as on his lips, interrupted him.

"Very well then," he said, "alternatively, your brother steps out of the dock a cleared and vindicated man, and you take his place, charged with the crime of which he will have been acquitted."

"Scrimshaw," said Eric, "you talk like a fool. Do you think I am a child to be frightened by such a bogey as that. Blagdon never signed that paper; it's a forgery, or, if he did sign, then he was out of his senses or under duress, and beyond that where are your witnesses?"

Scrimshaw touched a bell. Stanyer threw the door open and in a moment father and son stood face to face.

Yes. Eric beheld the father he deemed he had followed to the grave nearly a year ago, beheld him with eyes dilated and glistening with horror, consternation, dread; iron as he was for a moment his fibre gave way.

"What—what is this?" he gasped, then he, too, trembled unnerved. "Who is it?" he cried again. "It can't be a ghost, there aren't such things! It's a living man—but no, no, no! it can't be!"

"It is—it is," the old man cried in an agitated voice, broken by a choking sob. "Eric, my misguided, poor, sinful son, it is your father!"

Eric Geldart with slow steps retreated, maybe some four yards, with terror-dilated eyes fixed upon the grief-stricken man who faced him, the others looking on as though spell-bound. For a while he could not find his voice, until at last with an effort, he whispered hoarsely and slowly:

"No—no, it couldn't be! I don't know what your plot is, but you are not my father, though for a moment I almost dreamt you were his ghost."

Then in as few words as might be, George Geldart told the weird and eerie story of his awaking from the trance which had held him so long only just in time.

As he listened, Eric Geldart's face underwent many and strange evidences of the mingled emotions working within him; dread, horror, fear, doubt, incredulity, and as he listened he reasoned, thinking as always, what was best for his own safety, his own advantage.

And gradually, clearly, the conviction forced itself upon him that his safest course, the only course it seemed that would save him from ruin, perhaps from the gallows, lay in absolute and strenuous denial of that story.

Brushing aside all considerations as to its possibility, plausibility, probability, its truth or falsehood, when his father, ceasing to speak, bowed his face into his hands, Eric Geldart, by an effort of will recovering to some extent his normal composure, sneered:

"Upon my word, a likely story for a twentieth century generation. Whom do you expect to believe it?"

"I believe it," said Scrimshaw and Stanyer together.

"It is true," said George Geldart.

"And nothing is of less importance to me than your belief," said Eric, with a venomous sneer at the listeners to the story. Then to its teller, "You'll find it somewhat difficult to prove."

"Not so difficult perhaps as you imagine, Eric. If it were

(*Continued overleaf.*)

Wanted: More Babies.

In recent years so many gloomy predictions have been made concerning the decline in the birth rate in Great Britain, that it is quite refreshing to find that John Bull has still left a remnant of sturdy sons and daughters possessing the faculty of perpetuating their species in a degree not one whit less than the most prolific of their ancestors.

To the Lincolnshire Agricultural Society we are indebted for this inspiriting discovery. At their Annual Exhibition held recently in Lincoln, prizes were offered to the labourers who had brought up and placed out the greatest number of children. The first prize was awarded to Thomas Hought, of Tealby, Market Rasen, with a record of 19 children born, 17 brought up, and 12 placed out. Other competitors had families of 16, 15, 14, 13, and 12, there being altogether ten entries for the prizes offered.

That large families, such as these, should still be common in rural districts, at a time when the birth rate is steadily declining in the great centres of industry and commerce, is but another proof of the damaging effect of city life and air upon the national health and vitality. One eminent authority declares that of persons city born and bred, who have attained the age of thirty years, not more than one in every ten is free from indigestion in one or other of its varied forms. When we consider how the body is starved and poisoned and the vital functions impaired by this scourge of modern life, we cannot be surprised at any shrinkage in the birth rate or deterioration in the national physique. To stop this ruinous loss of vitality and restore the national stomach to its former efficiency is an object worthy the support of every true patriot. Fortunately no time need be lost in experiments. In Mother Seigel's Syrup we have at hand a digestive tonic that exerts a curative and stimulating influence upon the debilitated organs of digestion, which fully justifies the position it has held for thirty-five years as the national remedy for indigestion.

To tens of thousands of tortured dyspeptics it has brought comfort, health, and renewed vitality. One of them—Mr. W. Nicholls, of Whitehall Mansions, Archway Road, Holloway, N., says: "At one time everything I ate, and especially the things that I most relished, seemed specially designed for my torture. After every meal the pain and discomfort in my body and sense of fulness and oppression at the chest were most distressing and wearisome. Coupled with this were constant retching, and the frequent vomiting of an acid fluid. It didn't much matter what or how little I ate, my stomach seemed utterly unequal to its task and I suffered in consequence. Though I regulated my diet and tried all manner of medicines, I gained no permanent relief until I had recourse to Mother Seigel's Syrup, and that went right to the root of the malady. In a very short time, under its influence, I could eat whatever was set before me without fear of pain or distress, and felt brighter and more buoyant than I had done for months. If, by any chance, anything that I eat disagrees with me a few doses of Seigel's Syrup invariably put me right again. As a digestive tonic I consider it has no equal, and my own experience and observation justify me in strongly recommending it to all who are cursed with indigestion or a weak stomach."

Abounding vitality and buoyant healthfulness such as follow the use of this tonic of fruits, roots, and herbs, are the surest antidotes to dwindling birth rates and national decay.

Pity the Lazy Man.

Don't be too hasty in censuring the lazy. Disinclination for work is often an indication of ill-health, and the idler in such cases is deserving rather of pity than blame. Indigestion and torpid liver cause languor, depression, and physical and mental degeneracy as surely as Mother Seigel's Syrup, the tonic of fruits, roots and herbs, dispels indigestion, tones the liver, and gives energy, vitality, health, and that is a fact proved beyond doubt by the experience of thousands who have tried it.

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not true how could I have told you the conversation that transpired between you and Clare in what you deemed a death-chamber?"

"She might have blabbed—I mean I deny absolutely that such a conversation happened—it's a lie—a lie—a lie! Your object may be fraud or blackmail, but I'll defy you, and I'll fight you to the end."

"Eric!"

"My name is Mr. Geldart, sir, to you. My father, George Geldart, is dead and buried, and I shall know how to protect my own interests and my own good name. As for you, Scrimshaw, I shall have a searching inquiry into your share in this transaction. I'll have it all dragged out where you found this man, how the impudent, impossible story was hatched, what you paid or promised him."

Scrimshaw made a step forward, then paused, controlling himself, and said with a scornful laugh:

"What I paid him—ha! ha! ha! Your father, Eric Geldart, can buy you ten times over."

Eric, surveying the not too smart figure, with a sneer said: "Another strain on credulity! I never gave you credit, Mr. Scrimshaw, for so bold an imagination."

"It's true, it's true, Eric," said George Geldart, a note of triumph breaking into his tone. "I've worked the System, I've proved it, I've proved and it's rung true from beginning to end in every detail. I worked it with Scrimshaw: we started it with tens and made hundreds, with hundreds and made thousands, went on with thousands, made tens of thousands, with tens of thousands we made hundreds of thousands—and I've proved that if you'd only believed in me and been true to me, you, Blagdon, Ronald, aye, all of us, might have made our millions!"

Once again Eric blenched. The System, the System, that he had heard the father he deemed dead dilate upon, as he considered, rave about, the wonderful manipulation of figures and of financial mechanism.

And it had triumphed. Now he understood much at which he had marvelled.

The remarkable, unaccountable fluctuations in the Share Market of late, the frequent absences of Scrimshaw when Eric had called, his frequent and sudden visits to the Continent, the relegation of matters in connection with his ordinary business to his clerks, his recent developments in style of living, environment, and so on, his stupendous purchases at big prices of art treasures, horses, yachts, and so forth, and his munificent gifts.

Eric had always guessed that some abnormal influence was at work to account for these things, and had characteristically ascribed them to some colossal and triumphant stroke of fraud.

And then Blagdon's confession! Yes, yes, with growing horror he felt that the story he had just heard was true, felt that his own doom was sealed, but he would not own it, even to himself.

Facing them defiantly he exclaimed:

"It is all a pack of lies, part and parcel of some scheme of fraud, a scheme that I, aided by the law, will frustrate and expose, an impudent imposture that you shall rue and suffer for, each and all of you."

"Go then," said Scrimshaw, "judgment will follow you, will some day overtake you."

He little knew how near that some day was.

Eric flung wide the door, turned upon them one look of concentrated malignity and defiance, then dashed out of the room, strode swiftly to the outer door, wrenched the handle from the servant's hand, shouldering the astonished man aside, and hastened down the corridor.

Ting, went the bell. He rushed forward.

"Stay there with the lift," he shouted, 'one moment."

"Too late, sir; stand back!"

But Eric, blind and deaf to all, except the passions that possessed him, rushed madly forward, clutching and forcing back the gate of the descending cage the man was closing. He forced it open; thrust himself forward, though the man cried, "For God's sake, back!"

There was a sound of a crashing, sickening blow, Eric Geldart, with a groan, sank in a huddled mass half-within, half-without the cage that fell—and then stopped fearfully.

A few minutes later a horrified group stood round his prostrate form, a doctor kneeling beside him in Scrimshaw's rooms, where, at his request, they had taken him.

Opening his glazing eyes he whispered: "How—long—have I—to live?"

"Not very long," said the doctor.

"Send for——"

"A clergyman?" asked the doctor, filling up the pause.

"No—a magistrate."

"My boy, my boy," said old Geldart, kneeling beside him—"my poor lad, what do you want to do?"

"To—put—things—right, to—undo—some—of—the—wrong, the—hand of judgment—has fallen—on me."

Then for a while only his heavy breathing and his father's sobs broke the silence.

"Do—you—forgive—father?" he whispered.

"Yes, yes, my boy, the blame was not all yours, it was mine—mine, I made a god of gold and taught my sons to worship it. Then he turned to Scrimshaw, who had just re-entered, accompanied by another man, demanding almost fiercely, "Who is this?"

"My neighbour, Jefferson, who is a magistrate."

"Take him away," said the old man—"let the lad die in peace."

"I cannot—go—in peace—unless—I speak."

"But oh, my son—my son!"

"He is right," said Scrimshaw, "you must remember that you have another son. Justice must be done before it is too late."

Then in the silence of what was to be his death-chamber, Eric Geldart spoke, slowly, painfully, but distinctly.

"I have—read—that paper—Blagdon's—con—fession, it is—true—I—not—my—brother—robbed—my—father, I, and—Clare—planted—the notes—to—throw—suspicion on my brother. I—killed—Clare Armitage—to silence—her. God—have—mercy—on my—guilty—soul—for—Christ's—sake!"

His head fell back, the whispering accents ceased, and the soul went forth unto the Seat of Judgment and, thank God, of mercy.

THIRTY-SECOND CHAPTER.

Wedding Bells and Reconciliations.

The *Meteor*, in its next issue, which appeared upon the following day, excelled itself, broke even its own record in the way of sensations. It had done many things, had exposed gigantic frauds, brought home unpleasant truths to exalted people, originated and fermented during its short career many agitations which had resulted in drastic alterations in the law.

But on the day following the sudden and tragic death of Eric Geldart, the *Meteor* provided its readers with a sensation that was the subject of general topic that night in every club, dinner-table, or place of assembly in London.

The morning papers had furnished one sensation in the death of Eric Geldart, the Member for Little Claverton, but the *Meteor* surpassed them. For just when the editor of the paper had passed the complete number, Scrimshaw burst into the office with orders to stop the machine, and was closeted for a while with Mr. John Widdicombe, the general manager, and the editor, with the result that two formes were unlocked and reset up, and the paper on the following day appeared with an article which set the town by the ears.

For it dealt with the whole story of George Geldart's narrow escape from premature burial, his second secret life, and it wound up with the declaration that Ronald Geldart, charged with the murder of Clare Armitage and against whom a coroner's jury had returned a verdict of Wilful Murder, was

(*Concluded on page* 542.)

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The "Borderland of Deafness."

It seems remarkable that many people who have defective hearing refuse to believe that they are deaf. Although such a defect may be slight or only noticeable when the afflicted person has a cold in the head, and may not seem worthy of attention, yet such a condition will, of a certainty, become actual deafness if neglected. In fact the Aurist finds it most difficult in many instances to determine when the ear ailment began and consequently looks with great suspicion upon the slightest degree of defective hearing as placing the afflicted person within the "Borderland of Deafness." The Editor of *The Review of Ear, Nose and Throat Diseases*, in the last issue of this medical journal, goes into this subject thoroughly, and for the sake of those who may be interested will send, post free, on application, a specially written paper on Tests of Hearing and the Prevention and Cure of Deafness. All applications should be addressed to The Editor, Drouet Institute, 10 Marble Arch, London, W. The Editor advises patients, however, when possible, to visit the Drouet Institute for a personal consultation with the medical staff. Consulting hours are—in the morning, 10 to 12, and in the afternoon, 2 to 4, week days only. A fee of five shillings is charged for personal consultations.

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absolutely innocent of the crime, and that his innocence would be established by the evidence of his dead brother, and by a written confession made by Boanerges Blagdon, the one time candidate for Brixwell.

And when on the afternoon of that day Ronald Geldart appeared on the remanded charge against him, the court was crowded to suffocation. It was Cousin Jack who conveyed the startling news to Ronald Geldart.

Cousin Jack, accompanied by Madeleine Lorraine and Ronald's solicitor, entered his cell. First they told him that they had good news for him, then that the good news meant that evidence was to hand clearing him of the crime, that that evidence was the confession, the dying confession of the actual murderer.

That that murderer was his brother!

And here the strain told on Ronald, and he broke down and sobbed upon the bosom of Madeleine.

But they soothed him, told him to nerve himself, to prepare to hear yet more startling news, and they paved the way to breaking that news by telling him that it cleared him from all suspicion of having robbed his father. This gave him comfort, a comfort tempered, however, by his own exclamation: "If only my father could have known!"

Then they told him that his father had known, they could satisfy him on that point, strangely, marvellously. Then, bit by bit, they broke to him the startling story of his father's narrow escape from premature burial by waking from the trance that was so like the death.

And later they brought his father to him, leaving the pair alone in that strange interview that wrung both their hearts, that stirred innumerable emotions.

And later on Ronald Geldart left that crowded court discharged, proved innocent without a stain, after one of the strangest hearings of a charge that had ever taken place within its walls.

Blagdon had been called, had been sent for, and, not in the slightest degree to the surprise of those who knew, could not be found. He never has been found, though rumours have arrived by travellers returning from Colorado, Denver, U.S.A., that a man answering his description, but a silent, saddened, broken-down old man, is living there in retirement, his only companion a devoted wife.

* * * * *

George Geldart, though he reassumed his name and identity, led thenceforth a quiet, subdued, secluded life, devoting the means he had amassed to the alleviation of want and suffering and amelioration of the lot of those around him.

The truth of his story was finally established by the Home Office granting exhumation of the casket that had been supposed to contain his lawful remains, but which was found to inclose instead only the contents he had enumerated. Hence the tablet to his memory was removed from the cenotaph, to be replaced, when the time shall come, by tributes rendered by sincerer hearts.

His few intimates are Cousin Jack, whose bright home he sometimes visits, and whose buxom, cheery little wife always affectionately esteems him as "Old Mystery." Stanyer, restored to the daughter he loved, is as happy a returned cornstalk as thrives on English soil. Also Scrimshaw, who having at last got tired of piling up fortune upon fortune, has taken to winning Derbys, growing orchids at a thousand pounds a bloom, and dreams of some day sending out a challenger to lift that cup that Britain covets but America has nailed down.

So now this tale is almost ended—a tale of wrong wrought, injustice endured; of suffering and of sin, but at last of innocence vindicated, of injustice in some degree atoned for, of wickedness brought home and terribly requited.

It ends, as all stories dealing with a lover and his lass should end—with wedding bells. Wedding bells for Ronald Geldart and for Madeleine Lorraine, despite her father's anger, his declaration that if she bore that name he would see her face no more.

They were married, as became the circumstances, very quietly, and after their wedding they went away together for a while to try to forget in new lands and new surroundings the sorrows they had known.

The wedding bells of Cousin Jack and Phyllis, who are none the less happy because once, a while ago, Phyllis closed and buried in her heart of hearts a little love story that only she herself knew of, and that never worked out to an ending.

And someone else still cherishes a story that she and she alone has ever known of. A little servant-girl in a Bloomsbury boarding-house, who, while polishing boots, fireplaces, or knives and forks, dreams again and again of that bright Apollo whom it was enough for her to behold and worship from afar. Her love story never will have an ending because it will endure as long as she lives, for her alone to know, for her alone to muse on, until her dreams are broken by the rocking of the bells and shrill or strident calls for Arethusa.

Viscount Lynton, deceived in Eric Geldart, broken in spirit and in fortune, had declared that he would never again look upon the daughter who had disobeyed him and who for the sake of the man who though proved innocent, bore the name of one who had led him to his ruin.

For years he kept his word, nor indeed was he approached with any overtures to reconsider it.

And then, at times looking back, he saw where he had erred, saw that the estrangement between them had been of his own causing; and, broken in health and fortune, he began to yearn for the daughter's love that he had thrown away.

And one day, to distract his mind from these thoughts with the Spring sunshine, the Spring air, and the Spring flowers, he strolled into the Park.

And, by-and-bye, he happened on a fair-haired little fellow scarce some five years old, in great distress, and inquiring the cause the Viscount ascertained the little boy had lost his nurse. Patting the little golden head, Lord Lynton asked where his home was, and being told the number of the house in Holland Park next asked the little belated wanderer's name.

A pair of blue eyes, still tearful but sunny, looked up frankly in his face, and the little fellow lisped:

"My name, dear kind gentleman, is Lupus Ronald Geldart."

Geldart! The old man started at that name. And Lupus! Then she had given his name to this, her first-born, her dearest loved with the sunny hair and eyes. Yes! yes! he could see something of Madeleine in those eyes.

Then she had not quite forgotten him, had preserved some love and tenderness for him, they were not quite so far estranged as he had thought!; had they known it, perhaps had never been really so very far estranged at all, only too silent, too reserved, too occupied each with his and her own ways; he too absorbed in his dreams of politics and wealth, enmeshed too tightly in the Snare of Gold to take even her, his only child, close to his heart.

And while these and a thousand other thoughts flashed through his mind, he was walking on holding the little fellow by the hand.

And the younger Lupus, confident, trustful, and now quite composed, began to chatter of the things that occupied his dreams by night and day—his boats, his pony, his toys, and—best boon of all—his dear mamma.

And by-and-bye they came to the threshold of the little fellow's home. It was swiftly opened—not by the pale-faced servants in the hall there, but by the distracted mother, who swiftly stooping swooped up her treasure to her arms. Then she looked at his friend and guide.

"Father! father!" she cried. "You—you brought him back to me!"

"No, no, Madeleine! He brought me back to you!"

The End.

Next week starts "A Criminal Millionaire," by George Griffith.

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19/6 Genuine Italian Mandoline, by Stridente, Naples; fine tone; 21 ribbed, real rosewood, pearl and tortoiseshell inlaid, in saddler-made case; approval.
8/9 Feather Boas; bankrupt stock; special bargains; real Ostrich Feather Boas, beautifully curly; perfectly new, in box; colours: grey and white, black and white, and natural.
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7/6 Curb Chain Bracelet, with paddock and safety chain; 18-carat, rolled gold (stamped and guaranteed), in velvet case.
6/9 Brooch; very handsome 18-carat rolled gold, 3 swallows in flight; set lovely turquoise and pearls in case.
21/- Lady's solid gold Keyless Watch, jewelled in 10 rubies, beautifully engraved case, splendid time-keeper; 10 years' written warranty; week's free trial.
8/6 Fashionable Long Neck-chain; genuine 18-carat rolled gold (stamped), beautifully finished; very choice design.
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12/6 Magnificent 5-row Pearl Collarette; finest quality, mounted with four bars of lustrous Orient diamonds, in velvet-lined case.
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SHOPPING DAY,

and that a large number of shops in London will be displaying a notice in their windows that they are giving a percentage of their takings on that day to the London hospitals.

We hope, therefore, they will make a point of making some purchase, anticipating some requirements on this particular day, *viz.*, TUESDAY, 3RD NOVEMBER. Most shops joining the scheme will be offering some special cheap lines, and reducing their prices to make a good day for the Hospitals. Boots and bonnets, furniture and eatables, all and everything, little and great, help the scheme.

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Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.*]*

A Lax Lover.

"I HAVE been going out with a young man for four years," writes "SISSY," "but he has as yet said nothing of marriage, though he has told me he cares for me very much. I am not in a hurry to marry, but my friends keep on questioning me about the date of the ceremony and what sort of ring I am going to have. Don't you think it is time he made some proposal? I feel rather hurt at his want of confidence in me."

* * * * *

Yes, four years is a very long time for a courtship which has not blossomed into an engagement. I should quietly tell the young man the questions that are being put to you by your friends, and leave it to him to act in a straightforward way. Perhaps, as you say, he is putting by money for a home. In any case, he should have confided that much in you.

❦❦❦

Calf Love Again.

"MATER" has a son of eighteen, living some distance from his home. When he writes, he generally refers at length to his "love" affairs. Lately he has been talking about becoming engaged, though he is only earning a very small salary. How should "MATER" act?

* * * * *

As a general rule, "MATER," youths of eighteen do talk rather freely about engagements, and such things, and are generally fairly flush in the matter of love affairs. These things are not to be taken as seriously as if the youth were four or five years older. I presume the young lady to whom he refers has parents, who are not likely to allow your son to pay too close attention to her. A little visit to him would enable you to judge matters for yourself, and if things look serious, you had better take steps to stop it. A word to the girl's parents would, perhaps, have the desired effect.

❦❦❦

A Prejudiced Sweetheart.

"SOME months ago," writes "J. M. A.," "I fell madly in love with a girl of twenty-two. I am sure she returned my affections. Since that I have heard she is not fit to be loved by anyone. Much as I dislike to believe this, I have infallible proofs of its truth. I still love her, but feel I could not see her without being prejudiced. What is the right course to pursue?"

* * * * *

If "J. M. A." loves the girl, as he says, that is rather an argument against his contention that she is not fit to be loved. She must have some redeeming qualities to have attracted him as she has. Let him ignore the "infallible proofs," and find out for himself whether or not she is a fit object of his affections. Nobody is blameless in this world, and a lover should be the last one to cast stones at the object of his love. Be charitable, "J. M. A.," and only be influenced by your own personal feelings towards her.

How to Start an Affair.

"I MET a young man the other day to whom I took a great fancy," writes "H. T. Y." "He has not seen me since, nor has he written or sent any message, so I do not know whether he wishes to resume the acquaintance. However, I myself am very anxious to do so. Will you please advise me how I can give him the opportunity?"

* * * * *

If "H. T. Y." has a friend who knows the young man, she might ask her (or him) to convey the hint that she is anxious to open up correspondence. Should the young man be also inclined to do so, probably he will write to "H.T.Y." on some matter or other, giving her an opportunity of replying. If "H. T. Y." has not a mutual friend able to do this service, why not drop him a line herself? She might easily find some excuse for writing; asking him for an address, or something of the kind, and she could then judge from the tone of his reply if he is inclined to correspond more fully. If not, then "H. T. Y." had better let the matter drop, as the young man may have other attachments.

❦❦❦

Etiquette of Presents.

"WHEN a man admires a girl, but has not yet proposed, or even expressed his feelings, would it be bad form to send her a present? If not, what kind of present could be sent?" "E. W." asks me this question, he himself being in such a position.

* * * * *

It is not correct to send a girl with whom you are slightly acquainted jewellery, or any item of toilet. Those are reserved for the later stage of the affair. At the first stage, the present should take the form of flowers, or pretty trifles, Books, music, too, are presents which can be given under such circumstances; or if "E. W." possesses a dog or a kitten, and knows the girl to be fond of domestic animals, he could make her a present of that sort. The present, by-the-bye, had better be made in response to some wish expressed by the young lady, or "E. W." may find himself in the absurd position of making an unwelcome gift. I have known stern parents to themselves return such presents to the sender, with curt notes, particularly in the case of jewellery. Certain gifts are looked upon as suggesting familiarity, and that is an unpardonable offence in a comparative stranger.

❦❦❦

A Mature Flirt.

"MONA" is in doubt as to the genuineness of a sweetheart of hers. He is a gentleman sixteen years older than herself, who has no particular occupation, but lives with his mother. Though he kisses and squeezes "MONA," and professes undying love, he has told her that he cannot yet consent to a public engagement. I am asked to say whether I think the gentleman has no further intentions towards "MONA" than to flirt with her.

* * * * *

From your description, "MONA," the man does not altogether seem of the marrying sort. As he has no occupation, and has reached a mature age, and also, as you say, has had a good many love affairs, and been rather "fast," he seems the kind of man that would trifle with a young girl's affections, but avoid the responsibilities of marriage with her. I certainly should ask him definitely what are his intentions, and decline to permit his attentions unless he makes a definite proposal. And why *not* tell your mother? Surely her advice in the matter is the very thing you want? Without knowing the gentleman, it is very difficult for me to say whether or not he is sincere in his admiration.

Cynthia

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These will be offered by competition, and the competition is this:—

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1. *Who wrote Robinson Crusoe?*
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3. *Who is your favourite hero (not fiction), and why?*
4. *Who made most runs in first-class cricket this summer?*
5. *Which is your favourite book, and why?*
6. *When was King Edward VII. born. Give year and day?*

The Second Set of Questions will appear in THE BOYS' LEADER (1d. every Tuesday), on Tuesday, November 14.

It will be noticed that some of the questions call for an expression of opinion only, and others you will have to search for in books.

Cut out and paste these questions on a sheet of foolscap paper numbering it No. 1. Write your reply to No. 1. immediately below, and then follow with No. 2, and so on, saying in what book you found the information and who helped you to find it.

Anybody may help you provided you say who. No competitor must be over 21 years of age. No reply must exceed fifty words. Keep all replies until the last set appears and until we tell you to send them in. Write plainly in ink on one side of the paper.

HINTS

Most towns and even villages have now a Reference Library, so it will be easy to get access to books.

Parents and friends may be able to tell you many of the replies, and you can use this information provided you tell us how you obtained it.

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The two successful competitors will be given the choice, after we have arranged with their parents, of entering one of the following departments of our offices:—The Editorial Department, the Art Department, the Counting House.

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At all events, here is an opportunity for some boy and some girl to put their feet on the first rung of Fortune's Ladder, and we hope every parent who has his child's interest at heart will make an effort on their behalf.

THE BOYS' LEADER is the best paper a boy and girl can read. It is only a few weeks' old, but has already, by reason of its healthy tone, taken the first place in this class of literature; and articles and stories are contributed by Jules Verne, George Manville Fenn, Theodore Roosevelt (President of the United States), Sir Henry Seton-Karr, M.P., Major Baden-Powell, T. P. O'Connor, M.P., Lord Ernest Hamilton, the late Max O'Rell, the Duke of Argyle, General Sir Evelyn Wood, G.C.B., &c., &c.

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